# The Devil You Know

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# The Devil You Know

by FalseProphet (Batmanthegroomer)

Summary


Will Graham is an FBI agent with a unique ability to latch onto the mind and memories of violently murdered victims. Through their eyes he can pick out details of their deaths which inexplicably lead to a quick ID and apprehension of the murderer. He placed himself in forced retirement after a particularly hard case sent him into a spiral of depression.

Now his old boss, Jack Crawford, has pulled him back in. After the hacking of a world wide television station showed a fifteen minute video about a rising cult to the world, ritualistic murders are happening all over the globe. Jack wants to catch as many of these pretenders as they can, as quickly as possible.

For that he needs the particular brand of talent Will Graham possesses. He just needs to keep an eye on what else possesses his star pony...

(A Hannibal AU wherein Hannibal is a demon improperly summoned by Will Graham.)


Notes

This chapter contains:

Descriptions of violence
Blood & gore
Demonic imagery
Nudity
Mention of mental health issues

# one

Will Graham stood on the precipice of Hell... if Hot Topic sold Hell and actually catered to the kind of clientele the Christians claimed they did. The scene before him was littered with matte black paint, faux gold goblets, an alarming number of spider and bat themed jewelry, red velvet, and enough blood to fill an Olympic sized swimming pool. What it didn't have were answers, and Will imagined the FBI wouldn't be finding them in the only body left behind. The naked woman had to be young though it was hard to tell under the black silk hood and the blood. The whole thing looked staged, set up in a suburban basement. The Satanic circle was even drawn in hastily scribbled Sharpie.

Will drew a hand across his face, sighing and closing his eyes.

"This is a mess, Jack." He muttered, voice small.

"You're lucky you missed the show earlier. I've been wading through Bible thumpers for the better part of the evening."

"I almost wish you'd pulled me back in for something more... I don't know, hardcore?" Will paused as he felt Jack's curious eyes on him. "This is--this is the work of children. Misguided, angry children. This woman isn't the only victim and it's only going to get worse."

"Yeah, well, the good thing about child murderers is that they're not experienced like the older ones. They make more mistakes. You got anything yet?"

"No uh, just give me a minute."

"Take all the time you need. Mom and dad are out of town, convenient time for a house party. I've got people trying to contact them now."

Jack considered patting Will on the back as he left, then thought better of it. The younger man was jumpy--jumpier still since Jack had pulled him out of self imposed retirement--and Jack needed him in top shape. He'd do the congratulatory man hug later. He moved back and leaned against the doorway, leaving him close enough to intervene but far enough to be a barrier to anyone else.

Will closed his eyes slowly, letting out a hiss of a breath from between his teeth. He recreated the scene before him in his mind with demented building blocks. He splattered red kool-aid like blood over the finished product, each and every drop in it's place. He laid her in the center and watched as the liquid moved backwards, spilled back into her and then once more out across the room. He circled the room along lines made in Sharpie as it solidified in his mind and became real. He walked the circle, carefully counting his steps until he rounded the room completely.

There were thirteen goblets, thirteen attendees. Thirteen points to the summoning circle on the floor and a symbol for each point. As Will rounded the circle a second time he could feet heat rising through his feet with each point... except one. He tilted his head to one side,

doubled back and stood at the point. It was cold. It was not the kind of cold that got under his skin, not the kind of cold that made him shiver and seek warmth, it was the simple kind of cold which merely suggested the absence of heat.

'She had been sitting here. She had been part of it from the beginning.'

Will's brow knitted together. He took another slow breath and crouched on the point. He reached out and let his fingers touch the concrete floor in between splatters of blood.

It crackled like lightning, like raw energy. His palms itched and he felt the static run up his spine and threaten to blow out the back of his skull. There was an aroma of spice and a fluttering in his stomach like caged moths. Wings beating against fleshy membranes that otherwise felt nothing. One was amusing but they began to multiply and the more they multiplied the faster their wings beat, the more enveloping the feeling became. Will wanted to sink into it and let it wash over him. He could imagine building shrines to these moths, setting them on altars and calling them Gods for this deliverance. He sucked in a sharp breath.

'This was new. This was exciting. She was eager.'

He slid his fingers up to touch the base of the goblet in front of him.

Cold, cold, cold. This cold leeched onto his fingers and traveled through his bones like marrow. This cold beat around his head and made him dizzy. He could feel the room spin. The twittering sound of icicles forming in his mind became soft, nervous giggles and then raucous laughter as his dizziness reached a peak. He opened his eyes and saw twelve children--teenagers--dressed like stylish vampires and Victorian monsters. Faces were blurred but lines were sharp, eyes were burning coals. They became demons and wraiths and floated up towards the ceiling where they gathered like smoke. Will's head tipped back, chin towards the sky as he tried to keep a lock on his tormentors.

'She hadn't known. She thought she was safe. She thought they were her friends.'

Jack sprinted across the room just in time to catch Will. The dark haired man tipped backwards, head thrown so far back he'd been knocked off balance. The sturdier man pulled Will quickly away from the scene so he wouldn't disrupt anything as he came back to himself. Jack propped him up against the far wall as Will gasped, shook and blinked furiously.

"Come on back, Will." Jack soothed, putting a tight grip on Will's right bicep.

"Your--uh--the victim she-she knew these people. She was friends with these people. Not--not long term friends. These were new friends, intoxicating friends. Talk to her parents, talk to her siblings, talk to her old friends. Find out who's new in her life."

"How can we ID her quickly, Will? Her teeth are gone, fingerprints burned off, no tattoos or piercings--"

"She is--she'll have--a history of depression, anxiety. Long suffering, quiet sufferer. Family wouldn't have taken her seriously. She's uh a teenager, they would have thought it was just hormones. They weren't ignoring her they just weren't listening. One sibling, much younger, spoiled. Good kid. Her parents won't report her missing for a while--she had a fake alibi. Her older friends might know the truth." Will turned his eyes slowly to meet Jack's. "Pay attention to any calls coming in from kids, Jack. They'll know more than the adults."

"You're a God send, Will."

"H-ha. For that to be true, God has to exist out there somewhere." Will jostled slightly as Jack slapped him on the arm, then offered him a hand up.

"I'm just glad you connect enough with the victims that you don't have to turn that thing you do on the murderers. Might lose you."

"Yeah, because this is so much easier on me."

As he followed Jack out the door Will turned. There, seated at the thirteenth point on the circle sat the girl. She stared plaintively at Will, tears in her eyes, arms wrapped over her bare form. Behind her loomed a single black shadow, edges whisped and trailing as it lowered its hands to grip either side of her head.

Will looked quickly away.

# two

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Religious talk
Negative talk about religions (specifically Christianity)
Mention of Satanic Rituals
Negative assumptions about rituals

"So as far as the US Government is concerned, this isn't a national threat." Jack Crawford sighed, leaning back in his chair. He raised his eyebrows but kept his gaze averted from the incredulous looks he knew he'd be receiving from his team.

"Are they idiots?" Jimmy Price spat. He threw his arms into the air and turned away from the conversation as if it would help ease his weary mind.

"This is the seventh ritual based murder in the country since that damned video, Jack." Beverly growled. "Years ago we saw one maybe every few years, even then it was mostly animal abuse, rarely actual dead people. How can they be ignoring this?"

"They're being smart, or at least, that's how it seems to them." Jack quieted the room. "The killings have been reported in eight countries. We're on the low end of the death toll, but we still measure up. Our government probably thinks it's acting preemptively against mass panic. Maybe by playing down how serious this is, they're thinking they can prevent more copy cats."

"Who even believes in this stuff anyway? It's all nonsense."

"It's not--not to the people acting out. They believe, that's all that matters. We can't--it would be dangerous to incite them by attacking those beliefs." Will shifted from where he stood behind Jimmy.

"Just like Christians." Beverly snorted, giving Will a studying look.

"We're not here to pick apart religions." Jack broke in again. "Every major religion has its faults. There's no time to play the blame game. Do we have any leads on the basement circle?"

"A few. Calls came in like someone opened the flood gates after the news ran the story." Brian leaned forward, fisting his hands together. "A lot of concerned parents; mostly just wondering what we were going to do about making sure their kids understood the dangers of Satanic rituals. A few of them were reporting missing teens--most of them called back to

report their kids had gotten home safe. We've got a small handful of those still open. Seven are missing girls. Five fit the description of our victim."

"Good. Let's drop the religious angle and treat this just like any other murder. I want to know who she is before lunch."

Jack clapped, a noise that was both loud in itself and loud in the silence that usually followed one of his serious orders. The group scrambled to their feet, to leave, except Will. He moved back until he hit the wall to let the others go. When only he and Jack remained in the room he stepped forward.

"Why aren't you telling them about the hacker, Jack?" Will asked quietly, as if other people were still listening.

"It's not information they need to have. It doesn't pertain to what they're doing. It doesn't have an impact on their investigation." Jack rested his elbows on the table, watched as Will slowly approached him. With his wild hair and eyes too-big behind his glasses, Jack thought he looked like a wild animal. Or like the two unwashed mutts he insisted on sleeping with in lieu of human company.

"I would think you'd want your soldiers to know everything about the war they're fighting."

"And what should I tell them, Will?" Jack's voice was sharp as Will sat down. "That they still haven't caught the guy? That nobody--not a single damned soul in the whole fucking world--can figure out how he did what he did? Nobody can trace it. Nobody knows anything about it. For all we know the fucker just up and vanished, and with a face like that somebody, somewhere should have seen him by now. Please, tell me how you think that's going to help and inspire my troops?"

Will shrugged, looking aimlessly around the room. He hated that it felt so familiar to be there. He rubbed his palms on the arm rests, felt a tug at the dark corners of his mind. A serpent coiled around his ankle from under the chair and he crossed his legs to break it's grasp.

"If it were me out there I'd just want to know everything. It might help me to make informed decisions."

"It might help to scare you out of your mind and cloud your judgement. Not a single damned person in the world really thinks these demonic rituals do anything. Well, no sane person--and don't bring up religion again. But that doesn't stop everyone from being just generally put off by the whole thing. Even if you don't believe it, it's still scary on an instinctual level. It's like chasing the boogie man. And if I tell them that, well Hell, they might actually be doing just that? They'll go apeshit out there. They'll start shooting a shadows, Will. Innocent people are gonna get hurt."

"Innocent people are already getting hurt, Jack."

"Not if we keep on our toes. Not if we keep up what we're doing. Not if you keep your head on straight and help me catch these sons of bitches."

"I wasn't aware the anatomical state of my head was of concern to you, Jack."

"And what the Hell is that supposed to mean?" Jack tilted his head to try and catch Will's gaze as he looked sheepishly away. "You're more than just a tool to me, Will, you're a good friend. I might even say my best friend if I didn't think my wife had a microphone on me at all times. The state of your head is of great concern to me. I almost let this shit kill you once. I don't want that to happen again, just like I don't want you to start feeling guilty when you see these murders all over the news, knowing you could have played a part in stopping them. Even if it's just one."

"Well, I'm--I'm touched by your concern Jack. I'll think about that the next time I'm feeling someone die."

Jack rolled his eyes towards Will.

"I really don't have time for your sarcasm." A smirk spread on thin lips as Will offered a dry chuckle. "How's Abigail?"

"Intrusive, as always. She's getting good grades, thriving. She says she almost feels normal. Lucky her."

"She owes all that to you, Will."

"You had a hand to play too, Jack. You can't shove paternal responsibility on my shoulders alone. Plus I know Bella gets on your case if you don't call Abigail at least once a week."

"If I didn't think it'd hurt your feelings, I'd give in and let Bella adopt that girl."

Will laughed, relaxing in the chair under Jack's smile.

"I don't really put too much stock in legal parental obligations and benefits. Abigail trusts me, I trust her. Even if she became Abigail Crawford, she'd still like me best."

Jack lifted his hand and pointed to the door.

"Get out of my office." He growled, smirking.

Will lifted his hands defensively and stood up. He tapped Jack's desk twice with his knuckles.

"I'll be at the farm, if you need me. I'm not technically an agent so I'm not technically permitted on the field."

"Since when has technicality stopped you?"

"Since I quit, Jack."

# three

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Will Graham being gross and cute with his dogs

Will enjoyed the crunch of his tires on the driveway. No matter how into music he had been, no matter what song had been playing, he always turned off the radio to hear the sound. It was warm and familiar. If 'home' could have a sound, he imagined, it would be the sound of tires on gravel and dogs barking in the distance. Except, as he parked, he realized those barks were not so distant. He rolled down his window.

"Well, hello. What exactly do you think you're doing out here young man?" He grumbled as Winston eagerly leapt up. The dog planted his front paws on the door and attempted to lick at Will's face.

"Oooh no. No love for you until you apologize. Did you bust another window? Is Buster out here with you?" Will pulled his keys from the ignition and stepped out of the car. As he bent to undermine his own ruling, he heard a sharper bark from the porch.

"And there's the sneaky one. Don't you two understand the house is for your protection? There are coyotes out here." Will sighed as he opened the door and both dogs darted in as if he'd been keeping them outside on purpose. "Little shits."

The inside of Will's home didn't hold quite the same sensation as the sound of tires on gravel and barking dogs. It was warm enough, comfortable enough but it didn't feel like a home. He'd thought about it before. He could squarely say it wasn't because of the lack of human presence--and he did say it, frequently, to Abigail, Jack and Alana because it was apparently their favorite topic of conversation--but he had no idea what was missing. He had pictures, framed and hung by Abigail. He had books, gifted to him by Alana. He had more fishing lures than he knew what to do with, purchased for him every time Jack happened upon them whether they were good or not. His dogs had beds and bowls and practically all the furniture. It was a lived in house. It was a loved house.

It just wasn't home.

As Will tossed his keys--onto the bed, hopefully--and entered the kitchen. He was hungry but he needed to make sure he sealed up whatever exit the dogs had made.

He mused that maybe the house didn't feel like home was because he didn't really know what home felt like. It was different for everyone--stupid to assume otherwise--but there were

similarities. Family was usually a keystone. It struck a dark cord in Will, deeper than he wanted to admit. His dogs were family; Abigail was family; even Jack and Alana more frequently felt like family than not... but he wasn't fooling anyone. Parents, siblings, children, lovers: that was the kind of family home was supposed to have. Will really didn't have any of those things, not anymore. His parents were dead and he'd never had any siblings, or none that he'd known about. His father did have a penchant for leaving him for days at a time. He might very well have some half-sibling out there somewhere. He hoped they never found him. He certainly didn't have children and that was because he'd never honestly had a lover. He'd had girlfriends, he'd been intimate with them, but never for long.

He tended to scare people away from intimate relationships without really trying.

After a brief but thorough walk through the house, the dogs' escape path still eluded Will. He returned to the kitchen, scratching his head, and poured himself a small glass of whiskey. He leaned back against the sink, crossed his legs at the ankles and looked down at his dogs. They sat at his feet, eagerly.

"I... didn't leave you two outside this morning, did I?" He said in a quiet, shaking voice. His dogs did not provide a comforting answer. He took a mouthful of whiskey and pressed his wrist to his lips, squeezing his eyes shut. The last time he'd done that... a black snake wiggled its way out of the drain and began crawling up his back. He stepped quickly away from the sink and his heel caught a wobbling cabinet door.

He turned quickly as the door broke from it's hinge and clattered to the floor. He crouched down, Buster and Winston happily moving to rub against his legs.

"Well, I'll be damned." He muttered, staring at the large hole gnawed and clawed through the cabinet, through the drywall and into the backyard. "I guess this explains the electric bill. How long did this take you?"

Will ruffled their fur and stood. He rested the glass on the counter and glanced cautiously towards the sink. The snake was gone, for now.

# four

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk of suicide
Mention of blood
Discussion of mental health issues

"I was wondering when you'd be by. Honestly I'm surprised it took you this long." Jack glanced up from his desk, eyes adjusting to the dark as he turned off the lamp.

"I had to wait until I was sure what I heard was true. I had to wait to see if you'd come to your senses before I had to come knock them into you."

"Are you here to knock sense into me then, Dr.Bloom?"

"No, Jack. I'm here to rip you a new asshole." Alana growled, stepping into the dark office.

"Would you mind doing it while I walk to my car? Bella's already started dinner." Jack picked up his briefcase and set it on his desk.

"How do you sleep with yourself at night?"

"I'm an FBI agent, Alana. I'm used to making my bed with foul sheets."

"Cut the crap, Jack. Why are you doing this... again?"

"Because we need him, Alana, we both know that. Will suffers the same fate as any glorified comic book hero--he wants a normal, happy life but he's got a special gift. He's got a special ability to help people and he and I both know he can't be happy if he's letting people die when he could be helping people live."

"He's not a superhero. He's just Will. Did you think he was a superhero the first time you brought him in?"

"No. No I thought he was a basket case. I brought him in to see what would happen. We were out of leads. A psychic had found a missing child about a month before, so I figured I could risk asking the autistic guy to help me track down a murderer." Jack watched as Alana mouthed his words in disbelief. He rounded the desk with his things and gestured towards the door.

"You practically black mailed him into helping you, told him it was one case, kept him running for two years and then when you cut ties you left him to commit suicide, Jack!"

"Decisions I regret every day of my life." Jack admitted, walking side-by-side with the dark haired woman.

"So what made you think bringing him back in would be a good idea? Are you really just sadistic enough to see how far you can push him before he tries again?"

"I didn't come out of that last bit scott free either, Alana. We all carry wounds from that... debacle. I didn't leave him to commit suicide, I was the one who drove him the god damn hospital. I still drive the same car, with the same blood stains." Jack narrowed his eyes slightly, even as he held the door open for Alana to pass through first. "I'm not trying to push him. I don't think this is a good idea. I think it's the only thing that's going to work."

"So, essentially, the way you see it is you can either bring Will into the thick of it so he can feel like he's making a difference, or you can leave him to his guilt? He'll either die fighting under your flag, or die alone by his own hand?"

"Honestly, if those are his only options I fail to see how I'm the bad guy." Jack paused as Alana's heels stopped clicking against the parking lot asphalt. He turned to face her.

"Will needs you to be his friend, Jack, not his commander. You need to listen to him. When he's had enough, make him stop even if he insists he can go on. You know him well enough by now to see those signs. Visit him at home. Invite him to dinner. Be his friend /and/ his commander. Otherwise... I'm not sure even your reckless driving can get him to help fast enough."

Jack nodded.

"I can do that, Alana. I've already sent Abigail to him. I've told her she's to spend the weekend at his farm and not to take no for an answer." He grinned at Alana's wry expression. "Told her not to call him, either, not to give him the chance to dodge her or go out of town."

"Oh he'll hate that."

"I know."

# five

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Mention of trauma
Vague references to traumatic events

He was alone in a vast, open field. It was nice, soft but it wasn't what he wanted. He preferred the open water. He supposed the field would do. Slowly accepting of his location he began looking around only to find nothing but long stretches of golden wheat grass in every direction. No trees, no buildings, not even the sky seemed to provide a break in the wash of gold around him.

A hiss and a rattling drew his attention forward and down. A large, black rattlesnake coiled and lifted itself in front of him. It's marble-like eyes locked onto his as it lifted higher and higher into the air. It's tongue--startlingly pink--flicked out and brushed the tip of his nose. A massive snake preparing to swallow him whole. To gulp him down in one massive lunge, not even bothering to bite him first.

Snow began to fall. He closed his eyes and waited for the snake.

"Get up and open the door already! I'm freezing!"

Will shot up out of bed, scrambling to turn as a loud knocking continued at the window behind his bed. Fumbling to make sense of what he was seeing, his vision cleared on the red cheeked, smiling face of Abigail.

"Hurry up!"

Will hastily pulled on the robe cast over his armchair. Stumbling over discarded dog beds he pulled open the front door. Abigail quickly wrapped her arms around him. He hesitantly returned the embrace.

"I thought you were going to sleep forever." Abigail grumbled, pulling back to step inside.

"Hah, not likely. I-uh, I'm a sound sleeper once I finally fall asleep though, sorry about that. You--you should have called first. What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be at school?"

Abigail indicated the large bag over her shoulder as she set it down on a small loveseat. She began removing her scarf.

"It's December, Will. All us college students get a break to look back on all the time we've wasted crying and eating ramen in the dark." She was all smiles as she bent down to give Will's much neglected dogs attention.

Without thinking about it, without meaning to, Will's eyes darted towards the scar along one side of Abigail's neck. Crawling forward from the back of his mind came the sound of screaming, of gunshots and heavy boots on warehouse floors. Men screaming orders and a small voice pleading, gently pleading. That small voice somehow louder than everything else. It still echoed in his head, late at night, caught him unawares in the middle of the day.

"Will?"

Will blinked and his eyes wandered quickly for a moment until he felt Abigail's hand on his arm. She smiled softly and rubbed the fabric of his robe. Her expression was slightly apologetic.

"Jack told me not to call. I know you hate surprises. I'm sorry."

"No uh, don't--don't apologize." He returned her grin warmly and stepped closer. He put a hand on the back of her head and tipped it forward to plant a kiss on her forehead. She took the invitation and hugged him again. A deeper, knowing embrace.

"You smell like dogs."

"It's the robe."

"No, it's not." Abigail pulled back, face ever smiling. "But it's not bad. I'll wait here if you want to go change or something. I brought lunch! And gifts, for you and more importantly, for your dogs." Abigail turned and moved to her bag. She pulled two over sized bones, decked in bright red ribbons free. Buster and Winston danced in front of her, barking with excitement.

Will sighed and stepped into the kitchen, heading towards the much unused upstairs. He used to sleep up stairs, he used to conduct most of his business upstairs, and then Buster had been hit by a car. Broke his leg in numerous places and could no longer go up and down the stairs. Rather than humiliate the jack russel by having to carry him up and down the stairs Will had moved his life to the ground floor. He had every intention to move it back once Buster was healed but they'd all fallen through.

He quickly pulled on an old, beat up sweater and a set of khaki slacks. His dressing was interrupted by a picture on top of the dresser falling over. He reached up and set it right. It was an embarrassing picture, but Alana and Abigail refused to let him get rid of it. Abigail sat up in a hospital bed, still attached to machinery but on the mend. On a small couch nearby Will was fast asleep, mouth open, hair a mess and glasses askew. Alana had taken the picture. Will wasn't quite sure what either of them saw in it that required he keep it. Still, he stroked his thumb over the glass and smiled.

Stepping back into the kitchen he was nearly bowled over as Buster darted past his legs, gigantic bone clutched in his jaw.

"That thing is twice as long as you are, stop running." He grunted, watching as the dog vanished up the stairs. When he turned back around he started as Abigail lofted a carefully wrapped gift in his face.

"Isn't it a little early for Christmas gifts?" Will sighed, accepting the box and turning it over in his hands.

"First of all, you don't celebrate Christmas, and second the holiday season is just an excuse to buy stuff for the people you care about." She moved to sit at the small table against the wall. Her eyes remained on Will's face, watching him eagerly for a reaction.

Will rubbed his thumb over the corner of the box.

"I uh--I didn't get you anything."

"That's all right. I /do/ celebrate Christmas, and we've got all weekend to go shopping."

Will turned to look at her suspiciously.

"Jack's idea?"

"Jack's idea." Abigail pouted and pointed at the empty chair across from her. "C'mon sit and open it!"

Will obliged, rubbing his thumbs over the gift once more before tearing the paper. He could practically feel Abigail vibrating with excitement across from him. Regardless of the gift--which honestly he was sure would be wonderful--her presence and happiness alone made him smile. Setting aside the festive red paper, Will cracked open the box. His eyebrows lifted and he couldn't help a small gape.

"A-abigail." He muttered, staring down at the beautiful watch.

"Good, yeah?" Abigail beamed. "Time /and/ date, since you are just atrocious at remembering both things. Maybe now you'll actually call to check in on a regular basis." She smirked, chewing on her bottom lip as Will stood. She leaned into him as he kissed the top of her head and hugged her shoulders.

"You really shouldn't have spent so much on me. Getting bones for the dogs was enough."

"I knew you'd say that. Which is why I got them the bones as an after thought."

Will laughed, leaning back against the table to put the watch on. He spun it slightly on his wrist and nodded.

"Thank you, Abigail." Will met her eyes and held her gaze. He frowned slightly as her brow creased, her lip quivered.

"I miss you, Will. You a-and Jack and Alana. College is great, I feel like I'm getting my life back but it's--it's just so lonely."

"Hey, hey..." Will soothed, moving to kneel in front of her. He reached up and took her hands as she moved to wipe away gathering tears. "Abigail, you've still got us. I promise. None of us are going anywhere."

"I know that." Abigail snorted. "I just mean... I'll make new friends my whole life. I'll meet new people a-and maybe start a family someday. But no one will know, Will. Nobody but the four of us will ever really understand. You know? And being so far from you three, being-- just being around people that don't know. It's really tough."

Will pulled Abigail into his chest, holding her as tight as he dared.

"I know. I know. Trauma has a way of doing that to people. It's a shame you've got to go through so much bad to feel so close to other people sometimes." He began softly petting her hair. "But you're a survivor, you've got this. You can make friends, good friends, close friends, who don't have to understand what you went through. You can share different, untainted memories with them. And at the end of the day if you just can't ignore those shadows any more, you'll have us. You'll have me." Will pulled Abigail's face up by her chin, making sure to meet her eyes once more. He nodded, she nodded back.

# six

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Religious talk
Negative religious talk
Objective religious talk
Light descriptions of violence

"Agent Crawford! Agent Crawford!"

Jack ground his teeth together and set his jaw. He knew that voice. Everyone in the god damned FBI--no matter where they were stationed--knew that voice. It took a crazy kind of individual to make themselves so known to the FBI. Jack was eagerly awaiting the day that she slipped up, broke the law even by a fraction, so he could put her behind bars and finally get some peace and quiet.

"Mrs.Lounds, how can I help you today?" Jack turned, all fake smiles in the too bright morning sun.

"Why are you withholding your latest victim's identity? It's been all over the news that you've known who she was since yesterday. What further harm could be done by giving us her name? We need to pray for that poor girl, help her soul ascend to the Heavens untainted by whatever she got herself mixed up in."

"I assure you, we're doing everything we can to help that girl rest in piece. We're withholding her name at the request of her family. I'm sure you wouldn't want to go against their will, would you, Mrs.Lounds?"

"It's miss, Agent Crawford, as you're well aware. You are, after all, responsible for my late husband's death."

"Now you know that's not entirely true. That whole thing was a terrible accident. Your husband was among a number of innocent bystanders who got caught up in a terrible thing. We did everything we could for him."

"Well it wasn't enough." Freddie narrowed her eyes, holding her Bible tightly to her chest. "Why haven't the police released statements about the Satanic nature of this crime?"

"Am I being questioned? Detained by the church?"

"Oh if only we were granted the same power as you over righteous sinners, Agent Crawford." Freddie tilted her head to the side and gave Jack a smile made of vinegar.

"There is no evidence to suggest the people responsible were committing these murders in the name of Satan."

"Murders?" Freddie attached quickly, voice rising in pitch. "Plural? There have been /more/ ritualistic killings!"

Jack sighed heavily and rubbed his face, looking away.

"Can this wait, Ms. Lounds? I have an important meeting."

"More important than giving the public the truth? More important than illustrating why now is the time to repent? To accept Jesus Christ? To turn from Satan!"

"Ms.Lounds, I honestly don't give a damned what you do in your spare time. I've got nothing against Christians--what I do have, is something against you. You're a thorn in my side. You're close to being considered an obstruction to justice. In any other situation I'd let you go, watch you unravel until you stepped up so I could cuff you. However, like I said, I have an important meeting to attend to. Have a good day, Ms.Lounds."

Jack turned on his heel and began ascending the steps to FBI HQ.

"You'll go to Hell for this, Agent Crawford! You'll burn in Hell for all eternity! May God have mercy on your soul!"

Jack rolled his eyes as the closing glass doors did all they could to muffle Freddie's voice. Even the building was tired of her screeching.

"She makes me sincerely hope there is a God." Jimmy called, stepping out of a small room and joining Jack. "Cause he certainly wouldn't be on her side. Hell, Satan may not even take her. Could you imagine putting up with that for the rest of time?"

"You look smug, Jimmy: what've you got for me?"

"Smug? That's the best thing you can come up with? You'll have to do better than that." Jimmy flashed Jack a smile as they stepped into Jack's office.

"You're the light of my life, Jimmy."

"Mmm, go on."

"We'll make my wife jealous."

"You still haven't let her off the hook for that recording device stunt, have you?"

"Would you?"

"Fair point." Jimmy shuffled through a few papers in his hands as he and Jack took their seats. Jimmy leaned forward and placed some photos on the desk. "It was Beverly's idea, since I'm feeling particularly kind and honest this morning. I mean, I still spotted it so it's still my catch."

"Just get to the point."

"Here is our victim from the basement circle." Jimmy said, gently indicating the crime scene photo. "And here is, well you know who this is." Jimmy--with even more tenderness than he'd shown the previous photo--slid another photo forward. He caught a minute twitch in Jack's face. Jimmy frowned and adjusted the photos so the woman in the second could barely be seen.

"Look at the circles, the marks on them... they're identical--down to the little scratchy marks that look like mistakes." Jimmy raised his eyebrows, looking for Jack's eyes, for some kind of recognition. "Jack a printer would have trouble making this kind of perfect match let alone some under aged kids drunk on Zimas, pretending to be vampires in their mother's basement."

"It's impressive, but it's not like it's hard to find these circles online or in books."

"You don't get it, Jack. I'm not just saying these are the same circles, I'm saying these are the /same circles/." Jimmy slid the pictures closer. He watched as Jack picked them up, careful to obscure the woman in the second photo as much as possible. The investigator watched as a slow kind of acknowledgement crept into Jack's features.

"There you go."

"How--is this possible?"

"You got me. I figure we've got two options. One--unlikely but more probable--is that whoever drew the circle in the first crime, drew the circle in the second."

"He's dead. The man who drew that circle is dead." Jack said, quickly and with a grim kind of certainty. "What's option two?"

"Hah. Option two is that whoever drew these circles was possessed by the same demon."

"Demonic possessions aren't real, Jimmy."

"Yeah? Tell that to these girls."

# seven

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Religious talk

"All right everyone, calm down and sit down." Jack called into the room, his voice easily carrying over the soft din of idle chatter. He looked out over the small classroom--set up like an amphitheater--and the vast array of officers and agents taking their seats. There was a strange kind of energy in the room, a strange kind of buzzing. Jack recognized it as embarrassed confusion and excitement. Exciting things in the Bureau vary rarely meant good things but they were still exciting. It took most agents quite a long time to finally accept the guilt of being excited by anything the FBI provided them.

Jack suspended a knowing smirk at Brian's half-leaning position on the front of Jimmy's desk. Beverly too seemed to be grinning at their expense. They were easy, familiar faces to pick out of the rather small gathering.

"I said: SIT DOWN." Jack bellowed, this order having the desired effect. There was a soft scrambling as everyone gathered turned their attention completely to Jack, to the front of the room.

"We watching a movie, Jack?" Jimmy called light heartedly. "Bill Nye the Science Guy?"

"I used to love it when the teachers rolled in the VHS players in high school. Meant I could check out." Brian added.

"Just because you work directly for me, you two, doesn't mean you're getting special treatment. One more word outta you and you're on traffic duty."

Jack's finger wagging silenced the two effectively. He indicated the projector behind him, the VHS player, the TV, all the old equipment.

"It's been... illustrated to me that with holding certain information from you might be hindering your ability to work on this case." Jack rapped his knuckles on the desk. It was as close to admitting he was wrong--or sorry--as he ever got. Never mind doing so in front of a rather large crowd. His pride was wounded and pacing the bars of its cage with a snarl.

"I didn't think it was important, but I've been /persuaded/ to reconsider." He glanced up and was surprised to see only curious faces. None of them were smug or angry, just curious about what he had to tell them. "I'm sure you're all very well aware that we still haven't pinned down our mysterious cult hacker." Jack flipped back the sides of his jacket and placed his

hands on his hips. "What you might not be aware of is just how far away from catching him we are. We've got nothing. We've got shit. Experts and agents and computer geniuses from all over the god damned planet are looking into this. Nobody knows anything. We can't figure out how he did this. We can't figure out where the signal even originated from. He connected to TVs across countries that have special magnetic fields or some shit in place to prevent other waves from coming in. And all kinds of other techno-babble that I couldn't give a rat's ass about except that it leaves us in a very bad place." Jack waved dismissively at the TV. "And, if that wasn't bad enough, we can't get anything on the guy himself either. No one, anywhere, has come forward with any knowledge on the son of a bitch. We've got people all over the world looking into anyone, anywhere, who's had any kind of major facial reconstructive surgery. We're looking into any men matching his age and physical description who have attended any kind of speech therapy classes. We're doing every god damned thing we can think of... and we're no closer than when he broadcasted. We've got nothing. Europe's got nothing. Brazil's got nothing. Nobody has /anything/."

"Why wasn't any of this information given to us four months ago? Why tell us this now?" Beverly, the only one in the room not afraid to poke at Jack's snarling pride.

"At first it was because we just thought we needed more time to find our lead. Then it was because we didn't want to give you nothing. Then it was because I didn't want all the speculation and wild imaginations to run with this. The crimes we're attributing to this hacker are of a specific kind of scary. This preys on humanities fears of death and the unknown. You don't have to be religious to feel a little tingle under your skin when exposed to this kind of bull shit. Atheists get the willies playing with Ouija boards too. I--Didn't want any of this to affect your ability to think rationally about what you see, hear and find out there." Jack paused. "Will Graham is the reason I'm changing my mind. His--elusive point of view can sometimes be necessary to find clarity I usually don't have."

Jack gave the agents a moment to digest. He watched them glance at one another, or stare blankly ahead to let everything sink in.

"We're here firstly to get everything out in the open, and secondly to watch this video again. Maybe even two or three times. I want you all to watch this man, study this man, commit him to memory. I'm not stupid enough to believe one of us is gonna spot him walking down the street, but I want you all to really know him. He's just a guy, just a man. He's got his priorities fucked up, he's probably got friends in really high places, but he's no demon. He's no vampire or lich or whatever other kind of made-up creature you might be imagining. He's just an asshole."

"Where /is/ Will, anyway?" Brian pressed, leaning forward to completely scan the faces in the room.

"I'm expecting him any second."

"Are there any speculations about this guy?" Beverly again, crossing her arms over her chest and propping her feet up on the table. "Anything at all?"

"Only vague stabs in the dark." Jack leaned back against the desk, mimicing Beverly's body language. "We've had linguists all over the video. They've been able to say, with some variety

of confidence, that he sounds American. His words are mumbled and sometimes hard to understand but they all agree it's not an accent--or that it's an American accent, depending on the linguists' country--it's the nature of his facial deformity. We're guessing he's mid thirties to mid forties, it's again hard to tell underneath whatever happened to his face. It's a good bet that he's had a lot of doctors in his lifetime--medical and psychological--which we hope is what's eventually going to help us catch him."

"Except that's falling through too, isn't it Jack?" Will sighed as he held open the classroom door to permit Abigail to enter first. Jack gave him a sour look.

"With the nature of his injuries and the easily recognizable scaring or deformities, we should have gotten reports from doctors and therapists already."

"Oh yeah," Brian muttered, loud enough to turn Jack's angry pride on him.

"Thank you, Will." Jack mumbled, nodding to Abigail's happy smile as she took a seat next to Beverly. Jack waved Will forward and turned to whisper.

"What in Hell is she doing here, Will?"

"She insisted. She says it'll help with her thesis, get her ready for when she gets into the academy. Plus," Will managed to tilt his head and meet Jack's eyes, "I had her all weekend. Without warning. It's your turn."

Jack resisted the urge to smack Will over the head. He turned back to the gathered agents as Will bent to plug in and attach all the cable components. Agents shuffled papers and took out notebooks and pens, shifted in their seats or turned to pass gossip and soft curiosities to those next to them. Jimmy, Brian and Beverly turned sweet smiles to Abigail, asking her quickly how she was, how her schooling was going, when she'd be coming to the academy. Catching up. Just like normal.

"Jack, it's ready." Will said quietly, passing a remote to Jack, snapping his hand away to prevent any physical contact. Jack watched him with a slightly narrowed gaze as he took up a standing spot in the corner. Jack lifted his hand and pressed the button.

Electronics hissed to life behind him, the dark room illuminated by the white, then blue screen. A single face, blown up to massive proportions, took up nearly all of the screen. His chin and the top of his head occasionally bounced out of frame when he turned or emoted too strongly. His eyes were dark, his nose sharp. His lip was curled in a permanent snarl, under the lip the edges of a set of full upper dentures could be seen improperly secured. The scar worked and wormed its way up into the lower part of his left cheek. The scar roped through the bottom lip and into his chin, puckering the flesh.

"You don't know me, and you will never know me, but I know you." The voice was slow, dark, purposeful. Not only was he conveying a message he desperately needed to be heard, he was taking his time to ensure people could understand him. It was obviously hard; he seemed to flinch and didn't want to look into the camera for too long. His facial expressions unnervingly reminded Jack of Will.

"I know each and every one of you. I know what stains your souls black and what lies you tell yourself to turn on lamps to make your souls look gray. You are not what you appear. Neither am I. I am ascending to a higher path, a higher purpose and now I am looking down with pity all the rest of you fools. But all is not lost. All is not dark and uncertain. I am certainty. My way is certainty. I can give you the majesty of your own becoming as you will soon see my own like the reckoning of Christ's return. It will blot out the sun. It will shroud the world in darkness and only those who have stepped beyond the veil with me will live beyond, will live in the light. The time has come to set aside everything you believe, everything you think you know. The time has come for you all to accept the inevitable--that you are all filthy, foul little creatures. You must be burned, be cleansed by the fire... by dragon's fire. Your faith means nothing. Your religions mean nothing. Your science means nothing. Join me, rise up and see the blackened souls around you for what they are. Cleanse the earth that I may more easily pick you from the wretches we will devour. The time has come for you to be cleansed... by fire. By dragon's fire. By the... Great. Red. Dragon."

# eight

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Will, Jack and Abigail acting like one big bunch of dorks

"You look so good, I can't get over it." Beverly said wistfully, giving Abigail a friendly appraising look. "When I was in college I blew up like a balloon."

"That's hard to imagine. You've got a metabolism like an elephant shrew." Brian jabbed, sounding a touch jealous. Abigail shook her head.

"I think it's probably because I can't afford anything but ramen."

"I told you I'd--" Will was interrupted as Abigail pointed at him.

"And I /told/ you, I wanted to do this on my own. I already owe my education to you, Alana and Jack. I can work my shitty part time job and feed myself. Except when I'm in town. Then I'll eat whatever Bella puts in front of me." The group chuckled, even Will. Abigail's hand drifted to the thin, decorative scarf at her neck. She felt Will's over protective hand at the small of her back. Of course he noticed the gesture. The group turned as the classroom door swung open and Jack Crawford escorted himself out. His presence filled the hallway immediately like a fog. He turned his gaze to Abigail.

"You." He said darkly, shaking his head. Abigail took a few steps forward. Will moved to lean against the wall, rubbing a hand over the short and rough hairs on his chin.

"You." Jack said again, shaking his head and opening his arms. Abigail happily pressed herself to his chest. He peppered a few kisses against her hair.

"Did you have a good weekend?" Jack chuckled, letting Abigail step back. She glanced over at Will, then back with a smirk.

"It was nice, yeah. Quiet, calm. We went fishing."

"And shopping, Jack." Will added, giving a wave to the last remaining agents as they turned to leave. "At a mall."

"You got Will to go into a mall? Did you have a gun in his back?"

"No. She asked. Politely and took my feelings into consideration." Will's voice sounded like the grinding of teeth. His lips snarled just the slightest bit as he shook his head.

"Could I ask politely for you to attend dinner with us tonight, Will?" Jack said, voice sweet and playful. He squeezed Abigail's shoulder. "We've got the guest room all ready for Abigail. Alana is coming. We'd love for you to be there."

"Alana's going to be there?" Abigail said hopefully. "Last time we spoke she sounded so busy, I didn't know when I'd be able to see her next." Abigail fixed her wide eyes on Will. A silent plea.

Will frowned, lines in his face dark and sharp from lack of sleep. He felt his palms become clammy, his stomach twisted his guts into knots. He knew he would not have to pull on social pretenses around any of the proposed dinner guests, that wasn't even close to his concern. His imagination was. His memories were. The energy that they would all bring to the table, the thoughts they would all have bubbling just beneath the surface. It would eventually become a topic of conversation. Someone would have to bring it up, either vaguely or in great big poetic words. They would talk about. Could he handle it? Could he swallow the conversation?

"Will?" Abigail pressed, concerned.

Will quickly looked up and forced a grin to his cheeks. He nodded. If Abigail could take it, Will would find the strength.

"Wh-what time?" Will asked, grin twitching at one cheek as Abigail smiled down his acceptance.

"Six. Maybe six thirty. Bella knows her way around the kitchen but she gets lost in things." Jack nodded down the hall. The three of them fell into step like they'd walked together their whole lives. Will tried not to analyze their steps, their walking patterns. The shift in Abigail's weight like she was walking on the balls of her feet, like a doe or a gazelle always ready to run. The heavier fall of Jack's right foot, overcompensation for an injury to his left knee. Will's own nervous treads which took twice as many to match Jack's. He tried not to notice. He failed quite miserably.

"So, you'll be coming to the academy next year?" Jack pressed.

"I can't wait! I got my acceptance letter a few weeks ago. A few of the girls in my class say I had an unfair disadvantage. Not because of--because my father was a cop. They said I cheated, then they threw me a congratulations party anyway. It was... really nice."

"Well be sure to let them know, from me directly, that you can't cheat your way into the academy."

"Yes you can." Will grumbled, steps becoming a soft ambiance. "You can cheat your way into anything, if you know the material well enough."

"You're so cynical." Abigail whispered, loud enough for the three of them to hear.

"I'm realistic. People cheat all the time. You can even cheat psychological tests with enough study and knowledge. Find out what people want to hear, let them hear it, and you get

whatever results you plan for."

Will gave a strange look as Jack turned to shake his head at him.

"You should probably keep that kind of information to yourself, Will. Or at least maybe softer than a conversational tone."

"Right. We wouldn't want anyone thinking I'd cheated my way under the FBI bar to... what means, exactly?"

"Oh my god, you two. You're both pretty." Abigail groaned, letting herself in to Jack's office. Will lifted his eyebrows and tilted his head at Jack.

"I wouldn't call you pretty. Hard worked. Rough around the edges."

"At least I don't smell like dog."

# nine

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk of health issues
Talk of trauma
Talk of mental health

"Bella, I--I'm speechless." Alana whispered, sitting back. She enjoyed the genuine smile that played on Bella's dark face. "I feel like I should be paying you for this."

"You are paying me." Bella grinned. "I don't get compliments on my food unless I feed other people."

"That's a lie!" Jack bellowed from the head of the table, making Will and Abigail chuckle slightly at the normal-ness of it all. "I compliment your food all the time, baby."

"Yes but you're my husband. You're practically required by law to compliment my cooking."

"I'm fairly certain there's nothing about fine dining in most nuptials performed now a days, Bella." Will offered, taking a full mouth of his wine. The slight burn felt good.

"What she meant was that I'm required by /her/ law."

"I've told him before if he doesn't like what I'm cooking, I'll cook him." Bella laughed, tipping her glass against Jack's. Will enjoyed the way they looked at each other. Calm and comfortable, casual. It was what Will imagined someone who was comfortable in their own skin would look like when they looked into a mirror. Someone to reflect back at you the good things. Or the bad things, depending. Next to him he could feel Abigail stiff. He lowered his gaze to the table and then over to her chair. Her left hand gripped the arm rest tightly, white-knuckled. Turning his head away he cast a brief glance at her expression--smiling.

"Well you can invite me over any time. I'll pay you until I'm hoarse."

"Me too." Abigail added, chuckling nervously.

Will felt the snake around his shoulders. It tightened and pulled all the air from him, constricting his throat. He couldn't breathe.

Here they were. Here it was. Dinner was over, the show was done, and now they had run out of pleasant and topical things to discuss. The house had been buried in water and the windows and ceiling had just broken. Water was flooding in and they sat at the table, forcing

smiles and acting like nothing was wrong. They all knew the water was there, they all feared the water and what it would mean, but none of them reacted. None of them could break. They were all going to drown.

"I uh... I wanted to thank you guys for--for helping me have a normal to come back to." Abigail said, softly but strongly. She brought her hands up to fold them on the table. All eyes were on her, except Will's. He found his plate suddenly very, very interesting.

"Anniversary is coming up." She continued, voice a little weaker. "I was planning on visiting the cemetery. D-does any one want to come with me?" Hesitantly she lifted her eyes.

"I will." Alana said immediately, offering a supportive smile. "We can eat brunch, make a day of it."

"I'll see what I can do." Jack said honestly, nodding at Abigail. He would make a great effort, but he didn't like cemeteries. If he couldn't muster the courage to join her at the grave site, he would make it up to her with a special dinner or another likewise outing that evening. He didn't want to abandon her, he just knew he couldn't comfort her in a place where he was so disquieted.

Will envied that. Will envied that for Jack--Hell for most people--they could identify the places or situations where they felt disquieted. They could identify where they were or where they had to be to instill those kinds of emotions. They could distance themselves or fully guard and prepare themselves. They could tell friends and family and coworkers that a little oddness was to be expected from these events in those states. Courtesy and knowledge all around. Will had none of that. He didn't have the knowledge because he was always disquieted. Even in rare moments where he felt comfortable he knew any little thing could trigger the turning of the tide. He was never safe. He was disquieted in his own mind and he didn't have the ability to leave that behind. All he could do was try and maintain a sense of calm or at least some vague mask of humanity around other people. The best he could hope for was for people to think he was having some kind of episode or seizure and leave him be. The worst was... the prying and the questions and the hoovering. It sent chills up and down his spine. The touching. The concern which was thinly veiled suspicion. The--

"Will?"

Will lifted his head and searched the faces looking at him nervously. He closed his eyes and worked his face into an apologetic look, or what he hoped would pass as an apologetic look. He reached for his glass.

"I-yeah, of course. Yes."

"Yes?" Abigail said quietly. Alana looked concerned.

"The cemetery? You said..." The room seemed to sigh at him, expelling air like unspoken pity. Will's cheeks felt hot, coloring under the scrutiny he wasn't privy to. He pulled the glass to his mouth. He gave a small look to Abigail out of the corner of his eye as she leaned towards him slightly. Her voice was a quiet whisper, as if she were talking to an animal she feared was going to bolt.

"We stopped talking about the cemetery about fifteen minutes ago, Will. It's ok." She reached under the table and squeezed his arm. He nodded and gulped down more wine.

"I'll get you some aspirin." Bella said quietly, looking at Will with genuine compassion. He mouthed a 'thank you'.

"I've been talking with your therapist, Abigail." Alana said with a smile, attempting to break the tension but not completely change the subject. "She says you're doing well. She's surprised at how quickly you're adjusting."

"Yeah I hear that a lot." Abigail laughed. "It uhm--it gets easier with every day. Unless the nightmares come back; those set me back a bit. They aren't nearly as frequent though. Now it's usually only when I see something during the day that reminds me of it. Any of it. Whether I realized it or not. It's like it triggers the memories and my mind can't keep them back anymore."

"Well it's good you're getting through it in between. Nightmares are an unfortunate part of our lives, even people who don't go through what we went through have nightmares."

"I bet they aren't as bad, though." Abigail whispered, glancing around the table. She could tell by the haunted looks in all three faces that they felt the same way.

"It's--they're worse when you wake up and realize it wasn't just something demented your mind cooked up." Will supplied.

"Have you stopped hearing things during the day?" Jack pressed, trying to put himself into a psychological conversation while understanding very little of the actual practice.

"Mmhmm." Abigail nodded, tears just glistening in her eyes, not yet ready to fall. "That stopped a while ago. Stress from school, in the beginning, started them back up but my therapist put me on some really good pills. I take them when I feel that stress achy feeling, and usually it prevents things from getting real bad."

"Be careful with medication." Will said quietly, anticipating the argument he was starting. "It can cause as many problems as it solves."

"Will," Alana jumped in predictably quick, "don't. There's no shame and no wrong in taking medications when you need them." She raised her eyebrows and tilted her head towards him slightly. He felt reasonably guilty.

Jack nodded slightly, following the conversation but having very little to input. His eyes strayed to Will, more nervous than usual. He folded his lips in and pressed them together in something of a pout, worrying against them like Will worried against the world.

"And here we go. Aspirin for Will, cake for everyone." Bella called delightedly, carrying a gigantic cake into the room. Jack started to applaud and the table joined in, laughing and smiling.

The snake slowly slithered down Will's back and away, chased off.

# ten

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk of mental health issues
Discussion of medication
Medication abuse
Medication neglect
Alcohol abuse

"You know that conversation we had last week, about the anatomical state of your head?" Jack sighed, coat pulled up tight, breath a ghost in front of him. He tilted his head as Will nodded. "Where is your head now, Will?"

"I'd like to think it's squarely between my shoulders. I'd like to think it's got full support, and a good, sturdy rest."

"You'd like to, but...?"

"But I guess it's not." Will sighed. "It's... probably somewhere in my gut. Being digested, squeezed, opened up." He rubbed at his temples, wincing.

"Are you still taking your medication?" Alana asked quietly as she joined the men on the back porch. She quickly pulled her coat in tighter, shoulders hunching against the cold.

"I--no." Will paused to consider lying and in the end decided against it. He could feel Alana and Jack exchanging looks behind his back.

"Why not?" Jack pressed first.

"I wanted to drink, really drink, and I'm not supposed to do that." Will felt like shrinking away, like curling up under the porch like a nervous dog. He heard Alana sigh and she moved up beside him.

"Why substitute one drug for another?" Jack mused.

"Because one isn't working anymore." Alana answered, watching Will's face. He slowly nodded.

"Why haven't you told us?" Jack's voice was angry, but more betrayed than anything. Will turned, pressing his back tightly to the railing. He kept his eyes down.

"It's not something I like to discuss, plus you two have a multitude of other things to worry about."

"I'll say it again, Will, there is nothing shameful about taking medication when you need it." Alana slowly put her hand on Will's arm. It earned her a cautious look.

"I'm not ashamed to be medicated. I /need/ to be medicated. I'm just tired of constantly changing prescriptions. I'm tired of getting those looks from doctors when I tell them it's just not working; the looks that say they're trying to figure out what I'm really doing with these pills. The suspicious way they all ask 'why are they not working anymore? It was fine a week ago.' I'm getting tired of telling people 'I don't know'. I'm tired of reminding myself how true that is."

"A lot of people go through tons of meds before they find the right combination of things."

Will shrugged.

"Listen, I can understand about the meds, I really can. I'm on Alana's side but I get it. What I can't--won't--tolerate is you assuming Alana and I are too wrapped up in other things to care about your well being, Will. We're like family, or at least I thought we were. You can't bottle everything up, trust me I've tried and I'm older than you so I've done it much longer. It doesn't work."

"You're not that much older..."

"Don't change the subject. I push you in the field, I know I do, but I also know you don't give a rat's ass about talking back to me. It gets too tough, you stop feeling like you're in a safe head space, you tell me to fuck off. You take some personal days, you get back to me when you're stable."

"And if you feel like you can't come clean to Jack, just give me a call. I care even less about talking back. I'll bring out all the fancy adult words."

Will laughed. He smacked his palm on the railing behind him once or twice, gently, just to hear it ring. His lip quivered for a second and he took a slow breath.

"It uh--it feels horrible knowing I'm coping worse than Abigail. It makes me feel selfish, weak. She was impacted more than any of us."

"Trauma effects different people differently, Will. Abigail is a strong, healthy young woman. She was a strong, healthy young woman when this happened. And you..." Alana turned quickly away, regretting the words too late. Jack frowned at her. Will gave a hoarse laugh, just one.

"And I wasn't. I'm not."

"You're just more sensitive to this kind of thing." Jack provided. "I feel selfish when I think about how hard I took all this, compared to how easily I deal with murder on a daily basis. Senseless violence against innocent people. I can come home and sleep well after seeing two

kids dead at ten and eight. But sometimes I feel that cold grip, that ache behind my eyes that tells me memories are trying to resurface. I don't sleep so well on those nights."

Will nodded, shook his head, he wasn't sure. He answered physically but couldn't concentrate to answer in a way he felt was appropriate.

"Just, promise us you'll try, Will." Alana rubbed at her arms. "Please?"

Will glanced up and met her eyes. He turned his head and met Jack's. He nodded and this time he was sure that was the right answer, or at least the one that they wanted. Beneath the comfort of the shadows on the porch the snake wrapped itself around Will's ankle like piano wire. It dug in and shackled him. It wasn't going anywhere. He was starting to accept that.

# eleven

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Gore
Violence
Nudity
Vomit

*The warehouse was dark, almost pitch. It was hard to see the gun three feet in front of him. His steps stumbled but were bolstered by the echoing thump of boots all around him. Jack was pressed at his back, officers surrounding him. His heart thudded to the tune of the marching boots. It pounded in his ears, it was hard to shake it off once he focused on it. It was all he could hear, all he could think about.*

*Then he heard it. It was like a record player left on in the room at the end of the hall. He could hear it, he knew what it was, but whatever song had been playing before was lost. As was the reason it was still on, playing nothing with no-one bothering to lift the needle. A voice he recognized was pleading in one long stream of words. Fear and sorrow broke her voice but her words never stopped. Once or twice a male voice broke through like the needle jumping. He didn't want to admit the voice sounded familiar. The audible clenching of Jack's teeth next to him told him Jack didn't want to either.*

*But they both knew. They didn't know what exactly awaited them in the next room but they knew whom they were going to see. They didn't want to. They wanted to turn around and rewind time. They wanted to see the signs before it got to this. They wanted to stop it, they wanted to help, they wanted to do what they thought they'd been doing the whole damned time. But the world doesn't work like that, reality doesn't work like that. Time doesn't rewind. A shattered teacup doesn't miraculously put itself back together.*

*There was a pause just outside the doors. The words became clear and he--they--wished they were still muffled sounds.*

*"Please don't, please don't. Don't do this, yo-you don't have to do this. I-I love you. Please. Dad. Please don't."*

*"It'll be all right. It'll be over quick. I'm so sorry."*

*He glanced over at the agent across from him, felt Jack breathing heavily at his back. There was a nod and for a few seconds everything ran in fast forward. The doors were kicked open, various agents yelled various orders. Just behind him Jack shouted as well, stepping in front*

*of Will protectively. Lights blared into his vision and whited everything out and when they cleared...*

*Everything. Stopped.*

*In the center of the room stood evil incarnate. On the floor, curled in a fetal position, rested a dark skinned woman. She was nude, blue and bled dry. Around her in blood was a ritualistic summoning circle. Just behind that a group of naked, dead young girls ranging from thirteen to eighteen knelt in the shape of a table. Knees bound together, arms across their chests to hide their breasts. Their heads were bowed, hair obscured their faces. On their shoulders rested a marble slab, six maybe seven feet long, dark gray and white. Atop the slab lay Abigail Hobbs, naked and bound like Christ on the cross. Over her FBI Special Agent Jacob Hobbs loomed, stroking her hair soothingly, knife branded in his hand and pressed precariously to Abigail's throat.*

*"Put down the knife and step away!" Jack shouted. Will's vision blurred, the gun in his hand shook. "Put down the knife!"*

*Jacob looked up and met Jack's eyes. There was sorrow in them, deep but rising to the surface was a dark and passionate purpose. He wasn't going to drop the knife. He leaned forward.*

*Will was moving before he realized it. His gun discarded clattered to the floor as his feet carried him just past the summoning circle. Just as Jack fired his weapon. The bullet intended for Jacob hit Will in the right shoulder, just above his scapula. He twisted and fell hard to the ground. Abigail screamed as the knife made contact with her throat before surrounding agents fired again and again and again. Jacob Hobbs stumbled backwards and collapsed in a pool of blood. Jack ran forward, helped Will to his feet as they quickly ascended on the marble table. Will freed Abigail and pulled her against his chest, letting her curl against him as he removed his jacket. Jack slowly rounded the table to look down at Jacob Hobbs.*

*"I didn't... have a choice Jack." Jacob whispered, blood leaking from the corners of his mouth. "You'll see... soon enough."*

"Will, Will." A loud knocking sound jostled Will awake. "We're here." Jack's voice was muffled from the other side of the car window. Will nodded and tried to come back to reality, shrugging out of the jacket he'd pulled onto himself earlier in the trip. He unlatched his seat belt and stiffly joined Jack outside.

"So this is different." Jimmy called, standing in the large corn field before them. A camera hung around his neck, gently supported by his hands in latex blue gloves. "We've moved from private parties to public exhibitionism."

"Hardly public. Can't see a fucking thing through all the damned corn." Brian sniffed, rubbing his nose on the back of his sleeve. His eyes were red, his voice clogged. He reached into his pocket and removed a Zyrtec nasal spray.

"The man who owns the land found it this morning. Unfortunately he doesn't know when it happened, he doesn't visit this end of the field too often. Said the last time he was out here

was the beginning of the month."

"Gives us about two weeks, give or take." Will sighed. Jimmy carefully led the two men into the green. In the distance voices and the clicking of radios signaled they were close.

A groan from Jack accompanied their exit into a clearing. A crop circle... a crop circle with thirteen points, thirteen goblets and thirteen strange symbols. Predictably displayed in the center was a nude woman, her head covered by a black silk hood.

"Please tell me we've managed to keep the press out. The last thing we need is people screaming about alien satanists." Jack looked to Beverly who offered nothing more than a shrug. He then turned to Will, who nodded slowly. "All right folks, you know the drill. Let's regroup and give Will his space."

Will rolled his head on his shoulders as the officers cleared out, leaving him alone in the crater of the circle. He took a deep breath. He closed his eyes.

The corn stalks slowly flattened themselves around him, bending and bowing as if in a strong wind. A strong and carefully guided wind. He could not see the hand which bent them, he could only watch as the stalks broke and laid themselves down in a particular pattern. A pattern he was starting to memorize and it disquieted him. Drifting like a feather in the wind the woman slowly descended to take her rightful place in the center. Blood traveled up through the ground like sprouts of plants seeking the sun. Their roots disconnected and one by one they slid back into the gaping wound across her throat. She slowly sat upright as if pulled by a puppet's strings. A rope pulled hot against the back of her neck, wound down to the knots around her wrists which curled further to the knots under her bent knees. She felt like she was on fire. She was easy to move, tired of struggling for so long.

Will approached the circle and suddenly everything opened up. It was dark and faces were hard to make out but he could see them. Trenches appeared under limbs struggling for some kind of control. Teetering between the points on the circle as if slowly realizing she was surrounded. Will began to round the circle and immediately felt differences at the points. Some of them were deeper than others, caused by heavier bodies, calmer bodies, bodies that set themselves down and didn't move for the duration of the ritual.

'She was tagged, gagged and forced here. They let her see their faces but only because they knew she'd never be able to tell anyone. This group was a myriad of ages and experiences.'

Completing the circle Will found himself stopping at a lightly depressed point. To his right he knew Jack stood with the rest of the officers. To the left was--presumably--the farm. He tilted his head to look up at the sky. The moon rose and fell aligned with this spot on the circle. This was a position of power. This was the man in charge, the man leading the ceremony.

Will found himself kneeling at the point, mind reeling. No. That wasn't right. She had never been in the circle. She was the sacrifice, the offering. Her place was in the center not at the point. She didn't belong there. She didn't...

Will held the woman in his arms, one hand gripping her hair and pulling her head back to expose the full length of her throat to him. He could feel her breath as she pleaded through

the hood against his cheek. The tool in his hands was short, intimate. As he pressed it to the side of her throat he could feel every inch of skin he sliced apart. He felt hot, heady blood spill onto his knuckles.

Will let out a shout and stumbled backwards, shaking violently, sick to his stomach.

"Will?" Jack's voice struck him like a gong. Will swallowed a lump in his throat and tried desperately not to vomit. He stumbled backwards again, feet dragging through the circle. He nearly fell but was caught by Jack, strong arms holding him up.

"I-I..." Will shook his head and tried to get his feet steady and underneath him. He watched as the agents returned to the field, frowning at the muddied footprints destroying the circle, the points and any evidence left there. Will's footprints.

"She w-wasn't, they brought her here against her will. She was weak and tired, could only struggle so much but she struggled for a long time. This group was all different, men, women, maybe some of the teenagers from the basement but-but there were older more experienced people here." Will glanced down to see blood caking his knuckles. He took in a sharp breath and rubbed his hands on his pants. Blinking he saw no stains. He felt a clutch on his arm and looked over at Jack.

"I'm... going back to the car." Will whispered in a frightened voice, pulling free of Jack's arm. "I don't... that's all I got."

"Are you sure? That's all?" Jack pressed, torn between concerned for Will and eager to hear everything Will could give him. Will nodded feeling his body lurch as it prepared to re-introduce him with his lunch. Jack released his arm and he made it to the edge of the field before vomiting. Doubled over with his hands on his knees. He pressed the back of his hand to his mouth, breathing heavily through his nose against the acidic taste in his mouth. The snake wormed it's way through the cream colored bile.

# twelve

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk of mental health issues

"Thank you." Jack muttered politely, nodding to the agent as she took his report and vanished down the hallway. His footsteps were heavy--heavier than usual with the new weight on his shoulders--and he returned to his desk. Will sat in front of him, hiding behind glasses Jack still wasn't entirely sure he needed. The Federal agent sighed.

"Will..."

"Do we have to do this Jack?" Will lifted his eyes but not his head. "Now?"

"Yes, and yes. I need to know what happened out there. I've never seen you so spooked."

"Well, it's not easy this thing I do. I'm always scared. You've just never noticed before."

"Bullshit. I'm always right there with you. I've caught you more times than I can count. You're always so far into your fantasies you forget what you're doing in reality. But you've never gone that far. You really contaminated that crime scene. You smudged evidence. We hadn't even gotten samples from the soil you trampled."

"I know. I know." Will rubbed his hands down the tops of his thighs, looking away and into the further corners of Jack's room.

"I'd like to say it was due to how sudden this all was. You clearly didn't get any sleep, plus you've been on two planes in less than three days. Jetlag aside, that's a rough day for anyone." Jack provided, frowning hard and creasing all the worry lines in his face. "Flying half-way across the country and back on top of doing what you do, can't be easy."

"Jetlag is probably the least of my concerns."

"I know that. So what was it then? Not to play any of this lightly but we've both seen worse--way worse--than this cornfield thing. What was it? What was so different about this one?"

"I'm not sure. I still can't... I can't really put it into words." Will fumbled for some kind of explanation, any kind of explanation that wasn't: I saw, I felt myself killing that girl. That's only happened once before.

"Are you stable? Are you in a good head space now, Will? Thinking clearly?"

"Yes, yes. Yes." Will nodded vigorously.

"Because I can take you off these cases. Just say the word. I'll put in the order right now, send you back out to your farm, no strings attached."

"We both know that wouldn't work, Jack."

"Mmmhmm, we do." Jack leaned back in his chair. "So what do you need, Will? What can I give you to make this easier? What can I do?"

"I'm not sure there's anything you can do." Will hesitantly looked up to meet Jack's eyes. "It's the nature of the beast, so to speak."

"This thing you do?"

"Yeah."

"Never seemed to get to you before."

"No, it did. Trust me it did. I just--I could hide it better then. I wasn't pulled so thin, I guess. I feel... used. Broken open. The pieces are all there but they aren't holding any water."

"Can I get you some sealant?" Jack chuckled, earning a small smile from Will. He knew Will hated the extended use of metaphors, mostly because Jack tended to get lost in them. He'd get angry after failing to follow the conversation and everything had to be repeated.

"I don't think so. I just have to work through it."

"Do you need a few days?"

"Can I afford to take a few days, Jack? We still haven't caught anyone involved with that basement circle and now this? I feel like stepping away now would just make the floor fall in."

"Well you're not holding up the floor, Will. We do have a few strong leads on the basement case. Once we IDed our victim we managed to follow your hunches, got some good information and now we're running with it. We also IDed our cornfield victim earlier this morning, and we're running on that too."

"You did?" Will leaned forward slightly. "Who was she?"

"Miranda Shore. Single mother of three boys. They were spending the weekend with dad. The divorce is still fresh so when she didn't come get the boys he didn't think anything of it. He thought she was just being a bitch, his own words. But after a few days he finally caved in and got worried about her. Called in a missing person's about four days before we got called in."

"So, not a virgin then?"

"Nope. First one as far as we can tell, though that's not exact science it's more like speculation. But definitely the only one with children."

"I didn't... I didn't get the sense that there was anything special about her." Will admitted quietly. "I felt like--she was some kind of disgrace. Like breeding stock that didn't come through or kept birthing still borns or-or something."

"You didn't--from her? You got that feeling from her?" Jack leaned forward, eyebrows knitted tightly together.

"No, Jack. From," Will paused, he sighed heavily, "from one of the people in the circle."

"One of the murderers?"

"Y-yeah."

"Shit, Will." Jack sat back again, folding his hands on top of his head. "When were you gonna tell me? Were you gonna tell me?"

"I wasn't and uh... no, obviously."

"So that's what did it. That's what had you so spooked out there. Rightfully so, I guess." Jack steepled his hands at his lips for a second. "The last time you got suckered in to the killer's point of view..."

"I know." Will interrupted. Jack didn't stop.

"You were familiar with the killer."

"Very familiar." Will provided hoarsely.

"You think there's a possibility you know one of these--"

"No, Jack. Are you listening to yourself? This was just a-a reaction. I haven't been sleeping well, Abigail's been on my mind, my medication is all switched around. It was just a fluke. I let myself loose out there and usually I try to keep a tight reign on where I go."

"Agent Crawford." A breathless voice called from the office door, where an wind blown agent had let herself in. Jack and Will turned to face her, Jack nodded for her to continue.

"We've got a-another one."

"Another what."

"Another murder, sir. Just like the others."

"Shit." Jack and Will were quickly on their feet, exchanging looks of worry. "Where at? How far?"

"Just outside Baltimore, sir. Maybe two, three and a half hours."

"I'll drive. Get me Katz, Price and Zeller. The usuals."

"Right away, sir."

"Will, you good for this?"

"As I'll ever be." Will winced slightly as Jack clapped a hand on his shoulder. They shared a look and for once Will felt a little comfort in knowing Jack was by his side, in his corner. He nodded strongly.

# thirteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Blood
Gore
Violence
Death
Nudity

Will was treading water. His arms and legs burned, his eyes wanted to close and his lungs felt useless. He couldn't see the shore, he wondered how much longer he should bother trying to save himself. Wouldn't it be easier at this point just to sink?

Will's eyes focused slowly on the scene illuminated by police lights. There were two firetrucks parked on the street, hoses being wrapped up and preparing to go. The air was still thick with smoke but most of the heat was gone. Will stared longingly out the window at the large community center. How he wished that's all he'd find when he walked inside, a community center. He dutifully followed Jack out, trailing behind him like the tail of a comet. Jack burned the path, Will just followed along.

"Agent Crawford, FBI. Tell me what we're looking at here." Jack demanded of the first officer they came upon. The woman gave Jack a nod, the same to Will. She could tell Will was with Jack and so she didn't question his credentials.

"Three dead, possibly four, it's really hard to tell with the amount of burn damage in the area. Luckily the place was closed down, locked up. Too early for even the earliest of morning people. We're hoping we can get some information from what's left but--there's just so much damage. We do have one witness in custody. I have a hunch he might have a guilty conscious, but I'm not sure how much he participated. He might have just known something was going down. He works at the center so, best guess is that he's the one that left the doors unlocked, or let the perps in."

Jack nodded. Waving at the smoke and the smell as she led them into the large indoor basketball court, or at least what was left of it. Will placed his tongue between the front of his teeth and bit down slightly. The pain let him concentrate on something other than what he was seeing for a brief few seconds.

Two men knelt in center court, their arms tied and wrapped numerous times over in chains which bound them upright to metal posts which looked to have been pulled from a wire fence. Draped over their arms was the sickeningly familiar form of a naked young woman.

Her head rested on a dug up tombstone and her ankles rested on another. The men cradled her between them almost lovingly. All three bodies were easy enough to make out but they were black, charred and cracking under the heat. Pulling his eyes away from the obvious Will's vision keyed in on the circle he knew had to be there. In this case it was burned, seared into the court floor--drawn in some sort of flammable agent, likely gasoline. After letting himself focus on it for a considerable few seconds he looked away. He began to look around with dark curiosity.

"Wh-where's the fourth body?"

"She said there might be a fourth." Jack corrected, folding his hands behind his back and walking a few paces forward.

"But they'd have to have a reason to suspect four bodies. I only see..."

As the men neared the display Jack pointed to the ground. Underneath the arrangement was a large pile of something burned. It was large enough to be a person, but it was clearly an origin of flame. Identification of what--or whom--that ash had been before was going to be nearly impossible.

"Four." Jack announced grimly. He met Will's eyes and for a second they were children at the threshold of a haunted house.

Will stepped towards the display. Jack moved to talk with the officer who seemed in charge.

Will tried to ignore the looks he got as he approached the 'decor'. He pulled a pair of gloves from his pocket and concentrated on putting them on. He circled the bodies like a vulture with the eyes of a stag; he was confident in where he was but not in what lie in wait. He knew death but he knew it was quickly approaching him. He was ready to flee but also keen to examine all he could.

The woman was un-hooded. Her hair was all but disintegrated but her facial markers were unobstructed by the remains of any cloth. The men, however, looked to have been wearing blindfolds. Leaning just a little closer Will could see a flame pattern under their chins. He took a quick look down at the woman before reacting. Her gut had been hollowed out and a collection of twigs and sticks stuck through her. They were almost completely ash but easy enough to figure out. The flame had been nurtured through her.

"They'll give you a few minutes. The crowd is getting rough so they want to pack it in ASAP." Jack said quietly.

"All right."

Will pinched the bridge of his nose, closing his eyes and listening to the officers move away. His mind immediately provided him with vivid recollections of the other two victims he'd seen far too recently. He pushed the thoughts back by constructing the altar before him with all three women. Slowly their bodies morphed and became the two blindfolded men.

Chains pulled over Will's chest, tighter and tighter until he wasn't as worried about suffocation as he was about his chest imploding. He wanted desperately to move but he was so tired, so tired. His head turned, catching any sound he could but he could not see. He could not speak. That is where he ended, alone and bound in chains.

'He never knew what hit him. How he died wasn't important, only that he die. He died close, his body wasn't moved far.'

Will turned his head to find the second man staring at him. The blindfold was still in place but red eyes of burning coal looked directly at Will. As he moved closer the man's head turned to follow him. He was not bound, not chained. Though his arms burned and his knees threatened to shatter he held his place. His head was high even as his back bowed ever so slightly.

'He was willing. He wanted this. He was eager for it. He knew this was his only way out... or the only way he'd prove himself worthy to a higher power. Righteousness born of guilt.'

Will then found himself staring at the floor of the court like a ceiling, suspended upside-down. His body was heavy, improperly held. His wrists burned against rough twine knots, pulled over his head and latched somehow to the floor. His knees ached as his ankles dangled, similarly bound. He knew he could not have been but a few feet off the ground but his stomach lurched with vertigo. He wanted desperately to move but he had trouble completely comprehending his exact predicament. It occurred to him slowly that he was nude. It did not seem to be a major concern.

'She wasn't terrified, concerned but not afraid for her life. She didn't struggle much. She knew her killer and, in some way, was not surprised to find herself here.'

He relaxed. Like a wild animal blindfolded he somehow found tranquility. His hands and feet began to go numb. He felt more and more dizzy as a buzzing sound started filling his ears. The sound became a cadence, words began to register. Will opened his eyes and saw snow falling all around him. No. Not snow...

Pages. The pages being read out loud. The buzzing.

Will closed his eyes again softly. He knew he would never open them again. It was a calm sort of sorrow that settled in his chest. The pain across his throat was brief, the pouring of hot blood down his arms was easy to accept.

'She was a martyr. She knew this was in store for her.'

Will sighed in preparation to come back to himself. He opened his eyes and found his hands splayed before him holding open a bible. In front of him lay the woman, staring up at him in a soft glow. He heard his voice in his own ears, strained and not his own, but boiling in his chest as he spat the words.

" 'And unto the married I command, not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband.' " Will's voice was dark, echoing easily in the almost empty court. He flipped to a dog eared page, tearing out all the pages between and throwing them into the air. " 'She saw

that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore.' "

Finally coming back to himself Will managed to stay upright. He stumbled backwards. He did not want a repeat of the cornfield. He covered his face with both palms, frowning at the uncomfortable drench of sweat. His hair stuck grossly to the nape of his neck.

"Will, you good? I'm getting the 'time's up' look."

"Yeah. I'm done here." Will felt exhausted. Not the kind of tired caused by lack of sleep. Not the kind of tired that made him short or angry with people. Not the sharp kind of tired his body screamed at him. It was tired like a warm blanket, like lavender and warm milk. He just wanted to lie down. Dear God he just wanted to lie down.

"One of the men was brought here against his will." He started, voice quiet as Jack led them out of the community center. "He didn't see or hear or know anything. He died thinking he was just a meaningless victim. The second, the second wanted to be here. Hell he may have volunteered. I think he... I think he was part of all this from--for a while. He had guilt. He was doing this to repent." Will stopped as an officer approached. In her hands she held a water bottle and a container of aspirin. Will looked at Jack, and the smug smile the agent wore.

"You never bring this shit when you need it most."

Will eagerly swallowed down the pills with a copious amount of water. It felt good, washing down his throat like ice. He and Jack ducked under the police line and were immediately face-to-face with a huge, writhing crowd. They rumbled in a low din but moved like a mass of insects. Will felt his skin crawl as he realized Jack's car was on the other side of them all. His breathing hitched and his heart began to race.

As if on cue Jack put his hand on Will's shoulder.

"Stick close. I'll push us through. Don't say anything."

"Does screaming count as saying something?"

Jack felt Will tense like a man in the gaze of Medusa. He half pushed and half pulled Will into the crowd. Other officers moved in dutifully to try and part the sea.

Will wanted desperately to close his eyes. This was too close to a nightmare come true. He dropped his gaze to his feet, counting breaths. Jack's hand broke from his shoulder for just a second before it was replaced. Will trusted the hand to guide him, not daring to look up.

One breath. Two. Three. Four.

Will took in a deep gulp of air as he felt the press of people give way. Using Jack's hand as an anchor he lifted his head and breathed slowly, deeply. The hand fell away.

"Thanks, Jack." Will turned. His eyes grew wide.

Jack was not there.

A tall, pale man stood where Jack should have been. He was older, face drawn in deep, dark lines. His thin frame was covered by an over large forest green parka. And in his hand was a short knife.

"You see?" He whispered. Will lunged for his gun as the man stepped forward, purposefully forward. "See?" He lifted the dagger, hilt against his own sternum. He intended to stab Will close, intimately.

"Will!"

Will pulled the trigger. The crowd screamed. Will pulled the trigger again. The man stumbled forward. Will pulled the trigger a third time. The man fell into Will as the surprised agent's legs locked up and his body refused to move. The knife sunk deep into the inside of Will's left bicep. The man toppled them both over and pinned Will to the ground, his gun in the man's gut. Will pulled the trigger one last time.

"Will!"

Jack lunged forward and unceremoniously shoved the attacker aside. He looked Will over fearfully, eyes quickly trying to determine what blood was Will's. Will's eyes slowly, fitfully met Jack's and the agent calmed.

Will, for his part, couldn't move but he couldn't stop moving. He shook as if in the throes of a seizure. He nodded at Jack while their gazes lingered on one another. He barely managed to get his feet under him. Blood streamed down his arm, soaking his jacket sleeves. Somehow through the chaos Will's hand tightened around the small book the other man had passed him. He slipped it into his pocket where the snake was waiting.

# fourteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

In depth talk of mental health issues

"Where is he?" Alana shouted, rounding the front of Jack's car. Her breath fog in front of her and illuminated in his headlights. "Where is he!" She demanded, stopped only as Jack grabbed her arms.

"Calm down, Alana. He's sleeping, in the back seat."

"You asshole!" Alana struggled in Jack's grasp. He frowned. "What did I tell you? What did I tell you!"

"I know, I know." Jack growled low, letting Alana flail for a moment before letting her go. He was not surprised to see tears on her face as he looked back at her shamefully. She crossed her arms over her chest and took in a slow breath through her teeth.

"What happened? What happened in Baltimore, Jack?"

"He got stabbed. He got too close. I took my eyes off him for a second and someone else moved in. I wore him down, lowered his defenses and made him vulnerable and bad people did what bad people do." Jack placed his hands on his hips, guilt was heavy on his tongue. "It's a minor injury. He needed stitches. He'll need to keep off it for a few days but he'll be fine."

"Bullshit! 'He'll be fine'. You're going to kill him!"

"He's not holding a gun, Alana." Will said quietly, closing the door behind him. He stiffened but didn't attempt to move as Alana pushed by Jack and wrapped her arms around him. He tilted his head down after a second and let her hold him. She was shaking more than he had been. She pulled away and looked to his arm, cupped his cheeks in her hands.

"Are you all right?"

"That--that's a stupid question." Will managed. He tried to look away but Alana kept his head still. "I'm fine. My arm hurts."

Alana let go and turned slightly. She pressed the back of her hand to her mouth. Will watched her look to Jack. Guilt speared them together and pulled them in.

"Stop it, both of you." Will growled. Both pair of eyes turned to him. "I'm not--I'm not a child. I'm as responsible for my own actions as you are for yours. If I'm in a bad place I'm here because I walked here, one foot in front of the other."

"You /are/ in a bad place, Will." Alana pressed gently.

"I know that. But it's not because you two put me here. So stop it. You make me feel... inadequate when you do that. Sick, unstable."

"We don't think you're--"

"Then stop acting like it, Jack!" Will reached up and grabbed his wrapped arm, frowning. "Do you know what it sounds like to hear you two go back and forth like this? Do you know what it's like to watch your two closest friends argue about who is more responsible for you than the other? It's like you're getting a divorce and I'm getting bad grades. Neither of you did a god damned thing. I'm not broken! I'm not a child. I'm not unstable!"

Alana frowned hard down at the gravel of Will's driveway. She felt Jack's eyes just past her head. Will was right, he frequently was even when no one could explain how he'd been right. She reached up and gripped the cross around her neck tightly.

"I've had to deal with this my whole life. People dancing around me because they aren't sure where to classify me. Am I a child or just some psycho? Do I really understand what's going on around me or am I lost to imagination? Am I mature enough to make my own god damned decisions or do I need a baby sitter? I had a doctor tell me once I should just go get castrated because I'd never be in the right head space to handle sex and the influx of hormones I was likely to experience would be traumatic. People assume they know what's best for me because I project the image that I don't know myself. I know myself, damnit!"

Alana flinched slightly. Jack rubbed the back of his neck.

"Now, if I'm not grounded, I'm going inside. I'm going to take some aspirin, call my dogs, and go to sleep."

# fifteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Mentions of blood
Mental health issues
Alcohol abuse

Buster and Winston were concerned. They knew Will wasn't right even if they couldn't exactly figure it out. They could tell his physical form was hurt, but they could also tell his mental form was aching. They wanted to make it better. They didn't feel responsible for it. They didn't pass blame about how it had happened. They didn't even hold Will responsible for the injuries. They just wanted him to be better. They offered all the comfort and nothing else. Dogs were better than people.

He lost count of the minutes he spent sitting on his ass with his dogs rolling around him like happy bugs. They whined and whimpered like he'd been gone for years, like he was a deployed soldier returning home. He felt like one. He winced and lowered his head, chin almost to his chest. Winston knocked his shoulder into the top of Will's head. He sighed.

"Thanks, boys." He muttered. He moved to stand--to finally remove his coat--and leaned on his left arm. He bit back a shout into a moan and fell back down. Buster and Winston gave him concerned looks, their rolling and rubbing stopped to permit Will a chance to recover. He nodded to them, as if to emotionally satisfy their need, and stood up using his right arm instead.

He peeled off his jacket and hesitated before holding it up in front of him. His left sleeve was stained dark red, almost black. He wasn't sure if he could get the stain out, or even if he wanted to. It hadn't been a great jacket anyway. He did like the way it felt, though, the weight of it felt good. Of course it would be this jacket that got ruined. He frowned and tossed it towards the fireplace. Buster darted after it curiously, sniffing the sleeve like a drug. Winston followed Will into the kitchen, uninterested in the jacket.

Will hesitated as he grabbed a glass out of a cabinet for himself. Part of him really, really wanted whiskey but a stronger part really, really wanted the pain killers he'd been given. Both things would help, he could sleep on a heavy enough dose of both, but he'd remember his whiskey dreams. Pain meds tended to make him forget what his eyelids burned against his retinas in the deep of night. He settled for water. He leaned against the counter again, crossing his legs at the ankle and staring down at Winston.

A cold breeze whipped against the back of his calves. He stepped away and glanced down. He still hadn't patched the hole. He'd covered it hastily but hadn't actually fixed it. Abigail had offered to help the weekend she stayed over but he still put it off. He wasn't sure why. It would be a quick fix. He rubbed the back of his neck. If he fixed it now, before he went to sleep, maybe his dreams wouldn't be so haunted.

He turned with purpose, set to do home repairs, when he stopped dead in his tracks. He took a few stumbled steps backwards until he hit the sink. Buster had trotted happily into the kitchen and clamped tightly in his mouth was the little book. It had been stuffed into Will's pocket. He'd thought he had imagined the whole exchange. In his mind he remembered pale eyes locking on to his, reading his soul and flaying him open for everyone to see. The knife turned at the last second, Will's gun pressed to the man's chest. A whispered question and the press of the book to Will's right side, concealed within his jacket. Will heard the ringing in his ears from the gun.

"Buster. Drop it." Will pleaded. Trained well Buster obliged. Sitting up on his back legs and barking afterwards as if to ask where his damned treat was for so politely complying.

Will moved forward slowly, as if reaching under a rock he was sure was hiding a snake. His rational mind told him it was just a book, but everything else in him wanted to run and recoil at the heat he imagined came off the thing. Under the strange scrutiny of his dogs' gaze, Will slowly picked up the book. Shifting on his knees he ran his fingers over the black cover. It was just a normal looking small journal. The book was not bound in leather and nothing ominous was written on either cover. The wire spiral looked well used, end caps ready to come off.

He opened the book.

The first page was well worn, smudged but most of it was still legible. It was a journal entry, dated five years ago nearly to the day. The man writing was concerned because he was hearing things, having strange nightmares and visions. He wasn't sure if they were hallucinations or just his imagination going a little rampant. He was trying, desperately, to cope and lead on like everything was normal but his ability to do that was failing. His boss was starting to get suspicious.

Will turned the page.

Another entry. The man was being drug tested at work, all his co-workers were acting against him. He could feel himself becoming more and more paranoid but he couldn't rationalize it all away. It was starting to seem completely plausible that people really were turning against him. He imagined they could smell crazy on him and were eager to turn him in to someone before the crazy wore off. Crazy wasn't contagious. He wasn't sick.

The third page was a description of a vivid hallucination. He had been in traffic, driving home even though his doctor had advised against it. He thought he heard a collision just behind him. He could have sworn he heard the breaking of glass and people screaming. So he got out of his car. The people around him honked their horns and he couldn't understand why more people weren't concerned. The accident had sounded serious, but he couldn't find it. He said he had walked in circles among the bumper-to-bumper cars and found nothing... until it

found him. He described a large black stag, bigger than any American type of deer he'd ever seen. It stood just down the median from him, staring at him, fur blowing in the wind. It had lowered it's head, extended it's ten point rack towards him...

The fourth and fifth pages were one phrase scribbled again and again and again in various stages of anger: I'm not sick!

Will placed his thumb in the book and stood, letting the pages close around his hand. He pulled himself up with the sink, wincing as it twinged in his left arm even as he used his right. He set the book down--open but words facing the counter--and poured out the water in his glass. He pulled out his whiskey and decided he would rather that than pain pills. He took a bigger gulp than he probably should have and picked the book back up as the burn wormed its way down his throat. He sucked in a sharp breath and fell into a fit of coughing as he turned the page. He had to set the book back down and hang over the sink to catch his breath.

The next two pages were a summoning circle that was going to become a permanent burn in Will's eyes. It was starting to fit to the black of his pupil. It was starting to be reflected against everything he saw like a stencil in front of a flashlight. Points started to represent people, things, places and Will could not stop the association.

Winston barked a warning, backing up on the tile as Will picked the book back up. Buster whined. Will 'tsk'ed at both of them and took another too large pull of whiskey. He flipped the page again and frowned. Writing was all over the place in no discernible order or pattern. Scattered throughout the words were scratchy pen drawings of the stag, different points on the circle were created through the points of his antlers.

Will read the text, turning the book upside-down and side to side to try and make sense of it all. It appeared the summoning circle was for a specific entity, a very specific entity. Not Satan as Will--and certainly other people--had thought, but a being Will began calling a demon though the author never called him such. Each of the points seemed to represent an ideal that this entity stood for or enforced or rebelled against. It wasn't clear. Thirteen points for thirteen different ideas. It was meant to shape the being called through. And if the points were too be believed, if they really could instill upon the summoned creature limits or thoughts or personality...

"Shit." Will laughed hoarsely. He poured himself more whiskey, swallowed down too much a third time and let himself simmer and burn leaning over the sink.

His eyes drifted to the watch on his wrist, the gift from Abigail. Six months ago the message had been shared across the world. Six murders followed the video in the next two months, almost back-to-back. They were sloppy, media fed on them like piranha but the killers were caught quick. Though the tabloids hit the nail on the head, the rest of the media was warned against spreading false rumors. They all chalked it up to people looking for an excuse to kill, going crazy over a stupid video. They said it was done. They said it was a fluke. Keep calm and carry on, they said. October saw a seventh murder, unlike the others. It was careful and planned out and disturbing. Jack hadn't had a choice, he said, he had to bring Will in. Will had done his job--like they both knew he would--and they caught the killer. Three weeks later and the basement circle had been found. The whole holiday season seemed like a blur in Will's mind. January had gone by too fast.

Will found himself pouring more whiskey, not sure when he'd moved from the sink or when he'd finished his last glass. He frowned as he felt the weight of the bottle. It was nearly empty. He glanced at his glass and then the bottle. He finished the whiskey in his glass in a loud, searing gulp. He placed the glass in the sink and picked up the bottle.

Will had only managed to find only one of the killers so far. It wasn't looking good on his track record. He didn't like it. It was a set back. On top of his growing inability to keep his mind from wandering to the murderers instead of their victims. It reminded him of the last time. Guilt was weighing in on him and he was losing the ability to keep going. He needed something. He needed a breakthrough mentally or to catch someone, to put someone behind bars and feel like he was making a difference. He needed help.

Buster barked and Will started. He looked down and his eyes moved from Buster's face to the dog's small paw. It set on the edge of a half-circle pattern on the floor tile. It completed a circle and provided four points within it. Will's head swam with whiskey. His chest burned. He looked to the book on the counter within arms' reach.

He needed help, and maybe someone had tried to get it to him.

# sixteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Self harm
Blood
Nudity
Alcohol abuse

Will ignored Winston and Buster barking from the other room. He had blocked them out of the kitchen by sliding the small table into the doorway and stuffing the chairs in their way. Buster attempted to dig underneath while Winston kept popping up with his front legs on the table.

Will wiped the back of his hand over his forehead as he slid along the floor. The charcoal he had decided to use--which was a messy idea, a bad idea--smeared over his forehead. He spun on the floor again and again until he'd drawn a full circle and then emboldened the circle. He glanced over at the notebook, laid open just where the table had been. Circle complete he moved on to the points, checking, re-checking and triple checking to make sure they were correct. For all the bad and death and suffering attributed to this circle, it seemed so strange the kind of demon it was meant to summon was indicated to be so... helpful.

Stumbling and reaching for the mostly empty bottle of whiskey, Will extracted himself from the circle. His body slurred like his words would have as he picked up the book and stood. Winston and Buster's barking became louder. Will attempted to shush them but his mouth wouldn't co-operate. He made a strange noise instead, which, in effect, temporarily silenced them.

Will held the book up waveringly in front of him, closing one eye. He studied the circle in the book, tipped it down and studied the circle on the floor and repeated. He heard Jimmy's voice in his head ranting on and on about how all the circles were too perfectly similar and how nobody was listening to him.

The circles were /exactly/ the same.

Will tipped the bottle back and flipped through the book. Further instructions were towards the back. There were words to be said and a blood sacrifice to be made. Will let out a dry chuckle.

"Well I'm not giving you my dogs." He laughed, finding humor in his drunken attempt at help. At his desperate last stand. He attempted to take another drink only to find the bottle

was now empty. He frowned and the room shuddered in response.

Blood sacrifice rang in his head. It didn't say how much or what kind of blood was needed, just that the blood needed to drip in the center of the circle while the words were spoken. Will's eyes moved to his bare arm, tracing long scars running up his wrist. It wasn't like he hadn't done it before, how hard would it be a second time?

Will held the bottle out to his side and dropped it. The crash and shattering of glass was over shadowed by the hysterical barking of dogs. Will knelt down and picked up a shard of glass, stumbling and landing on his knees almost on purpose. He set the book down in front of him, just outside the circle. He made a fist and held his wrist over the circle. His eyes blurred in and out of focus on the words in the book as he pressed the glass to his flesh with a painful familiarity.

He couldn't believe he was doing this. As he attempted to properly pronounce the words in the book--not sure what language they were in--he found himself laughing, chuckling at his own stupidity. He was drunk and now bleeding, fairly heavily, seated on his floor near a circle which was a keystone in every major murder under scrutiny in the FBI for nearly the past year. He hoped he'd have enough sense in him to clean the charcoal off the floor before having over guests.

He muttered the last word--the last sound--and his ears rang with the silence that followed. He narrowed his eyes and crawled backwards, wincing. The sharp ache behind his eyes turned to a powerful drumming sound. He felt his body jump and jerk with every beat. He wanted the wall behind him, he wanted stability. He wasn't aware of his dogs running to take cover under his bed. He wasn't aware that the drumming in his body was the tremoring of the earth beneath him. He pressed his back flush to the wall and closed his eyes. It almost felt good.

His eyes fluttered open and he stared at the circle. It wobbled and became fuzzy. He blinked, long and slow. Smoke began to rise from the circle like long fingers, gripping the circle between two points and hoisting itself up through the floor. More licking black tendrils of smoke rose through his kitchen floor, points of antlers too big to be real. Will blinked like a child fighting sleep, his body warm his chest heavy under breath. Two and then four more hands joined the first, six arms working to pull a smoldering pillar through the circle. It could have been human, inky black with eyes burning like red coals. Will closed his eyes and did not intend to open them until he woke in the morning, ignoring the pooling of blood in his right hand.

He wasn't sure how long he was there--bleeding and propped up against the wall--but he knew the whiskey was still hot in his blood when he opened his eyes again. He frowned at the blood clotting in his hand. It wasn't a deep enough cut to have been seriously threatening, though maybe he shouldn't have done it while drunk. The clot in his hand felt like jelly, lukewarm. He tilted his hand and let it fall to the floor.

"The charcoal will come up clean, but that will leave a stain."

Will's eyebrows knitted together. He jerked his head towards the circle.

"You should take care of that."

Blinking furiously Will recalled the strange smoke he'd seen rising, there was no more smoke. Standing in the circle was a man--a normal human man--completely in the nude and with a soft, amused look on his face. His hair was messed just slightly, coming down to about his ears in a grayed brown color. His features were sharp but somehow... exotic. His lips were uneven, thin within a soft shadow of coarse hair. His eyes were set on Will like a hawk, dark brown with a soft hint of red.

Will used the wall to push himself to his feet. He looked around the kitchen frightfully.

"Wh-who are you? How did you get in here?"

"Who I am is a complicated question, but, I got in because you let me in. You held open the door."

"I-I don't..." Will pressed his hands on either side of his head. He heard the man in the circle click his tongue on the roof of his mouth with disdain.

"Now you're getting blood in your hair. Shouldn't you sit down?" The man indicated the table and chair barricade in the doorway. As Will turned his head to look one of the chairs slowly pulled itself free of the arrangement and slid across the floor. Will fell into it, mouth agape, staring at the man before him.

"Wh-who are you?" Will tried again. The man sighed, folding his hands in front of himself strategically.

"I told you that was a complicated question."

"Uncomplicate it." Will whispered, lips quivering as he tried to let his mind decide what was real while he played along with the hallucination before him.

"Do you really want to know who I am or would you like to know what I am? Perhaps what to call me?" The man tilted his head forward slightly as he watched Will struggle with the words.

"Yes." Will pressed out from between his lips.

"I'll take this slow, for your sake, as you are obviously having a great deal of difficulty rationalizing reality. I have been called many things over many lifetimes. You may take your pick, or come up with something entirely new. It makes no difference to me." The man smiled slowly, like a snake in high grass, and began speaking.

Will blinked and lowered his gaze as if there were suddenly a bright light in front of him. The words buzzed around in his skull and sent pain lancing through his spine. The man was speaking but it sounded like noise, just a bunch of noises strung together. Will shook his head as if to tell him to stop, listening as the noises ran through his mind. He was trying to make sense of them but he couldn't, nothing stuck, until...

"H-hannibal?" Will said in a whisper. The man stopped speaking.

"What?"

"Did you--did you say Hannibal?" Will said, a little louder. His voice shook as he was still quite certain he was having a conversation with his kitchen floor.

"I did not." The man confirmed with a slight hint of offense.

"Well, I heard Hannibal. You said I could call you wh-whatever I wanted. So you're Hannibal."

Will watched as lines in the man's jaw tightened, he swallowed slowly and blinked. He seemed momentarily taken aback or surprised but it was a tiny twitch, a minute detail. How Will spotted it in his drunken stupor he wasn't sure.

"So be it."

"What are you?"

"That depends on who you ask."

"I'm asking you."

"Well, feeling a touch more sober, are we?" The man said, still amused. "I am myself. That's all I have ever been and I imagine that is all I will ever be. It is a good self, albeit a bit stagnant at times. Being out of the loop, as it were, for hundreds of years at a time can do that to a soul."

"Are you a-a demon?"

"I suppose that's a word for it. If you ask most religious folk of a Christian persuasion I am sure that is the answer you would receive."

"Are you real?" Will's eyes hesitantly moved to meet the man's. He swallowed hard, arms still at his sides. He watched the man's mouth curl in a slight smile. Will wanted to move as the man started to walk forward. It was a very calm, very slow walk, giving Will ample time to move should he chose to. Will did not. He sat and he watched as the man stepped over the charcoal lines and stopped in front of him. Hands still clasped in modesty.

"As real as you are."

Will felt his throat clench and his stomach churn. He parted his lips, eyes darting between the man's mouth and his eyes. He was too close. Too close for a number of reasons. He didn't want to speak but his body wouldn't let him go on without saying the words on his tongue. He swallowed again and his voice came out in a whisper.

"Prove it." It was almost desperate, though why desperation latched to the words was a jumble in Will's mind. He needed to know this was real but at the same time he needed to know he was just in the midst of a hallucination brought on by too much whiskey and trauma. He needed to know he was going crazy so he wouldn't have to own up to the fact that he had, quite possibly, summoned something like a demon in his hour of need.

The man unclasped his hands and slowly reached out. He paused, hand stilled above Will's right arm.

"May I?" He asked, polite and conversational as if the situation were entirely removed from them. Will could manage only a stiff nod. The man reached down with long fingers and grabbed Will's wrist. He carefully lifted the arm, studying the clotting, angry wound. With his other hand he carefully waved over the injury, letting his palm brush over the torn flesh. Will's eyelids fluttered. He glanced down as the man released him and stepped back. The wound was gone. The blood remained but the gash in his arm had mended itself entirely.

Will shakily looked up at the man, touching the bareness of his own forearm to feel what he saw. He shook his head and the man let out a soft breath.

"Not one to be easily swayed, are we?" Almost as if he were being inconvenienced the man reached out, this time placing his hands around Will's left bicep. Will felt a soft breath of air between foreign palms and his injury. The man pulled away once more and a single flex of his muscles told Will all he needed to know.

"H-how..."

"Being who I am has certain advantages, Mr...?"

"Graham." Will answered on instinct, eyes becoming unfocused on the floor and the circle.

"Mr.Graham then. You certainly don't seem well. Let's put you to bed, hmm?"

Will glanced up at Hannibal incredulously. He was rewarded with a calm, confident and somehow soft look. In spite of everything his mind was shouting at him he nodded. He gave permission that his hallucination might walk him across the room, move his self imposed barricade, and tuck him into bed. His last conscious thought was that he was not looking forward to bathing the dogs once they broke in and stepped in blood and charcoal.

# seventeen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Mentions of blood
Mentions of self harm

Hannibal watched keenly as Will's breathing was heavy and steady, even before he fully hit the bed. The man was obviously exhausted, after all he had bled all over the kitchen. The demon gave a soft, amused chuckle. He glanced down through a veil of hair and found two pairs of curious eyes staring back up at him. He bent down and gently stroked between the dogs' eyes.

"Let's see what we've gotten ourselves into, shall we?" He purred, voice smooth and answered by wagging tails.

He stood and gave a quick glance around the room he found himself in. Small, modest, cluttered and covered in dog fur. Clearly the beasts had very few rules and limitations. He was certain that said something about Mr.Graham but he couldn't be bothered to attempt a psychological profile at the moment: He had more important things to worry about. He reached up and rubbed at his neck where he could feel a collar that would never be visible. He clenched his teeth. Lucky son-of-a-bitch, this Mr.Graham. 'Hannibal', the demon scoffed.

He approached a small table near the window set up with what appeared to be a rather complicated bit of hobbying. Folding his hands behind his back he leaned in to study the arrangement. His eyes trailed over the various tools and he smiled slightly. Fly fishing. Mr.Graham tied his own flies. He liked to be self sufficient, it seemed, able to participate in his hobbies without the need of socializing if he so chose.

Hannibal turned to scan the rest of the room. A beat-up couch, a well used fireplace, a few books scattered among dusty shelves and framed pictures of a domestic nature. Hannibal approached a wall of such photos and began scanning them eagerly. Mr.Graham was not in many of them, and the few that he was in he looked uncomfortable and unable to look at the camera directly. Hannibal made a note of this; shy or unwilling to be remembered in any way he wasn't sure. There were three faces on repeat in the pictures and Hannibal quickly assessed that these were the most important people in Mr.Graham's life. He considered at first that the two women were perhaps wife and daughter, but the other pictures quickly provided him with a confident negative. A few of the pictures were far too recent and the women looked far too content and happy to be separated from a nuclear family--and clearly there were no women currently living in the small house, so the answer was that they were simply good friends.

Dogs trailing behind him Hannibal made his way through the rest of the house. He came across more of the same and began putting together an idea of whom this inept summoner really was. A lonely, sad kind of man with too many memories and not enough space to keep them all. He liked things a certain way but also seemed to not care about others. While his dresser and clothes were neatly folded, labeled and organized, his kitchen was in total disarray and not only because he'd summoned a demon that evening. Some rooms appeared to only be used by the dogs and their limitless access to Mr.Graham's life. Indeed he seemed to care a great deal for their happiness in lieu of his own: Indicated by an as-of-yet unrepaired hole in the kitchen. The dogs had obviously caused the destruction, but Graham had not taken it upon himself to fix it yet, for whatever reason.

Hannibal searched through the man's clothes until he found things that would fit him. He was not altogether a different physique from Graham but he was different enough that finding anything to wear that didn't look atrocious was a bit tough. He settled for pants he didn't like the fit of, and a shirt he couldn't quite button all the way. He felt a mess, knew he looked like a disaster, but he didn't have any other choice at the moment. He needed to focus on how to fix the plans Graham had thrown a wrench into. He felt sure he could manipulate the man with a little prodding and perhaps put things back on track, but he would have to be much more careful if he wanted to avoid another mishap like the naming incident. Lying outright was now no longer an option. He was branded, attached and owned now though he knew Mr.Graham had no idea. 'It makes no difference to me', indeed.

He made his way back downstairs and into the kitchen, frowning as the dogs had discovered the blood and charcoal. They were sniffing around curiously but miraculously had avoided soiling themselves in anything. Hannibal made a soft hissing noise and the dogs immediately looked at him. He pointed into the other room and both dogs trotted away obediently. He gathered a few of the meager cleaning supplies he'd seen during his self-guided tour and returned to the kitchen. He pinched his borrowed pants at the thighs and bent down with a heavy sigh.

Well, if Mr.Graham wasn't going to clean up his mess... someone had to.

# eighteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

A disassociative episode
Talk of mental health issues
Mental health issues

*"I said get out of the way!" Agent Jacob Hobbs shouted, face set in a scowl as he shoved another clueless bystander aside. One of the things that made him feel the most isolated from civilians was the way they tended to respond to trauma or anything out of the ordinary. They got a deer-in-the-headlights kind of look about them; standing around, gaping and unable to process. He'd be a little more understanding if they weren't all 'healthy' and 'normal' most of the time. He shoved aside a final body and felt his chest tighten.*

*He wasn't even concerned with the carnage, with figuring out what had gone down--there were other agents in the area, other officers, let them handle it--his focus was singularly on Will Graham. The wild haired man sat on the curb, eyes glassy and unfocused as things and people moved around him in the lights of the police cars.*

*Jacob knelt slowly in front of Will. He reached out and touched Will's knee.*

*"Will. Hey, Will." He began softly, watching blue eyes remain lost in some other world. "Will Graham. You know where you are? It's uh--seven twenty three pm. It's Thursday, May eight." He rubbed Will's knee gently, gauging for a reaction. "Will. You're in Richmond Virginia, Will." Hobbs smiled softly as Will's eyes slowly gained clarity. He tried to keep a fairly neutral expression as eye contact was made, waveringly. Testingly. "Will?"*

*Will nodded gently and blinked, trying to focus on the feeling of Hobbs' hand on his knee.*

*"You know where you are, Will?"*

*"Virginia. Richmond."*

*"Good. What time is it, Will?"*

*"Seven... seven twenty three pm."*

*"Good. What's the date, Will?"*

*"May eight."*

*"Good. Good job."*

Will slowly opened bleary eyes. He felt Winston's steady breathing beside him and smiled sadly. It wasn't May 8 but he found himself wishing it was. Even recalling the terror of such an episode Will wished he could go back. Maybe he could stop everything this time.

He rolled over slightly and threw an arm over his dog. He felt the mutt try and turn his head to look at him, so he buried his face into the fur between Winston's shoulders. His arm rose shakily and then fell all at once as Winston sighed heavily and accepted his fate. Will chuckled.

"Crazy dreams last night, buddy." He muttered into warm fur. His reply was a tail thumped against his chest. Rubbing Winston's belly for a second Will sat up. He rubbed at his eyes, his face and frowned. He wore boxer briefs but no shirt. He hated sleeping without a shirt. He must have been really drunk putting himself to bed the previous night. He remembered too much whiskey but the rest was a blur. Strange dreams made him feel uneasy like something was on the horizon.

He put bare feet on the floor and walked into the kitchen, Winston curiously at his side.

"Good morning, Will."

Will stopped dead in the doorway. His face fell to an expression of complete apathy as he stared. A man wearing his clothes--which didn't quite fit--was cooking breakfast in his kitchen, with his pots and his pans and his food. He blinked slowly and opened his eyes to find the man staring at him.

"How did you sleep?" A gentle smile on sharp and unusual features. His graying blond hair was swept mostly to one side, though it still looked rather long and unkempt hanging at his ears obtrusively. Which, considering the state of Will's own hair, was a strange thought to have.

Will moved into the kitchen and sat down, hard. When he didn't offer an answer Hannibal moved his attention back to cooking. Will dropped his eyes to the floor as he tried to remember events he'd written off as whiskey induced dreams. His floor was cleaner than he could ever remember it being. Reaching over as he stared blankly at the floor he found his right forearm solid and unscarred.

"You're welcome." Hannibal called from the stove. "It took me the better part of three hours to clean the mess you'd made." He didn't sound put out, merely informative, as if it really mattered to Will how long it had taken. "Your floor was dirty enough to suggest you'd tried summoning demons before. Never worked, hmm?"

"I haven't..." Will started, and then found his voice failed him. He lifted his gaze as Hannibal approached him with a plate. Blue eyes followed the plate up to slender fingers, an exposed forearm under rolled sleeves, to a grinning, happy, nonchalant face. The expression soured just slightly as the plate was not taken from him. Lips were a thin line as Hannibal placed the plate on the table himself.

"You're gaping like a fish." Hannibal sighed, turning back to the stove. "Are you that far outside reality that you still can't believe what's right in front of you? I assure you I'm quite tangible. The sooner you just swallow this bitter pill, the better. With your unique state of mind I feel staying too long in denial could have severe consequences."

Will watched as Hannibal prepared another plate. He placed it across the table from Will and moved once more to the stove. He cleaned up his mess, or at least prepared to clean up his mess, carefully placing dishes into the sink and running cool water over them which sent great billows of steam into the air. He turned off the stove and claimed the seat across from Will.

"I summoned you." Will managed.

"Yes."

"Last night. With the circle... from the book? The circle from--"

"All the murders. Yes."

"Demons aren't real."

"Well, in that case you'll have to come up with another name for me. Shall I fetch you a dictionary?" Hannibal watched as Will shook his head. Hannibal sighed. "I know this is hard for you to understand, but trust me, the sooner you do the easier it will all be. I've been around the block before, so to speak, I know how these things work. The crippling disbelief you feel will subside, don't fight it. Until then, pretend we're old friends. Your breakfast is getting cold."

"You cooked. You can cook?"

"I can do many things, Will Graham."

"How do you know my name?"

"Your last name you supplied for me last night. I found your first name easy enough as I paraded through your home."

"You..."

"I needed clothes at the very least. You humans and your modesty."

Will slowly began to eat his breakfast. He felt words repeating in the back of his mind, bouncing around in his skull like angry bees. From under the table he felt a darkness creeping around his legs. Expecting the snake he was taken aback when a large buck revealed itself to be pushing at him with over-large, impossible antlers. It stood in the center of his kitchen, staring at him, head lowered.

Will leapt about a foot out of his chair as his cellphone rang from the other room. He didn't even bother giving Hannibal a look as he rose to answer it.

"Rude." The demon called after him.

Will nearly fell onto his bed as he sat down, grabbing the phone from his nightstand. He stared at the letters he knew said 'Jack' before answering it a moment later.

"Will?"

"Y-yes."

"I know it's early but I knew you'd want to hear this." Jack's voice was fast, excited. It was good news. Will's eyes drifted towards the kitchen. "We got one, Will. In custody, chained and processed at the end of the hall. He's confessed to everything." Will heard a loud buzzing behind his ears as he continued to stare at the open doorway. "He's not doing much else aside from confessing, but we're ready to change that. I thought you might want to be here when..."

"J-jack?"

"You ok, Will? You sound terrible."

"I-I'll call you back."

---

Jack Crawford stared down at his office phone in disbelief. It was as if Will hadn't heard a damned word he said. He hung up and frowned, folding his hands on his desk. The conversation left him feeling uneasy. He didn't like it when Will seemed so removed from everything, and with good reason. Will had been getting steadily better--until Jack pulled him back into the field--but Jack knew the signs, remembered them from years ago.

He grabbed his jacket and told Officer Starling to hold the interrogation until he returned.

# nineteen

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Religious talk

"The book said you're supposed to help me." Will said, seated again at the kitchen table.

Hannibal smiled to himself at the sink. He glanced over his shoulder to find Will looking at him, engaging in conversation. It had only taken all of breakfast for the hints of acceptance to sneak through. He nodded and returned to the dishes.

"And so I am. You called me here, the circle clearly indicates my purpose."

"That's not very demon like."

"Don't believe everything you read about us. However, I am not very demon like, as you'll find out. Our lives have been greatly misconstrued over the decades."

"I really find that hard to believe."

"But not unbelievable." Hannibal cooed triumphantly. "Survivors of history have the distinct privilege of recording their version of the truth. Sometimes they humble themselves to admit wrong doing on both ends, other times they place themselves as God-like and heroic. With no one to dispute their claims, their own version of history is made truth."

"Are you telling me demons have been... victimized?"

"Oh no, not hardly." Hannibal turned, draining the sink. "We do enjoy a good blood sport, now and again, and I won't deny at feeling a carnal thrill at violence, but we aren't here to cause chaos. We've been pulled from our plane of being into yours, to do your bidding, and more often than not it's the power that comes with that which puts us on the homicidal."

"'Power that comes with that'?" Will parroted slowly. He did not like the nod he received.

"Indeed. You have summoned me, albeit poorly. I am here to help you. What I help you with is entirely up to you."

"But not how you help me?"

"Ahh, you're catching on quick, William."

"Will." He said quickly, a flash of something like anger in his eyes. "It's Will."

"My apologies, Will. That is what has been termed 'making a deal with the devil'. I will help you with whatever task or tasks you set me on, but you will have very little say in how I go about helping you."

"I can set boundaries, though?"

"If you wish. Though I have a tendency to muddle things, little details. To be honest I don't think any summoner really puts stock in boundaries after a few days. It takes far too much time and effort to try and account for every possible outcome of any possible situation, and after the migraines and lost days usually they just bottom out and pass us simple requests. You can firmly wash your hands of any bloodshed that way."

"No, I really can't. If I set you on a task and someone dies as a direct result of that, the blood's on my hands."

"Only metaphorically. Only if you believe in that kind of thing."

"What do you believe in?"

"Oh, no. Please." Hannibal knitted his eyebrows together. "I detest talking religion. Everyone believes that demons are intricately tied in with the Christian faith and honestly it gets so tiring after the four hundredth explanation. Can I sum it up with: the Christians were partially right, but they did not create demons--demons created the inspiration for themselves?"

Will nodded, watching curiously as the tense look faded from Hannibal's face.

"Good. Now," Hannibal took his seat across from Will, "how may I assist you, Mr.Graham?"

"How does this work, exactly?"

"Essentially, you put me to a task, I complete the task."

"For how long?"

"For as long as you'd like. Your whole life, if you wish. A hundred years here or there makes very little difference to me. You're what, mid thirties? At best you'll live to your late eighties--not even in your line of work--and at that time I'll be free of you. You're in control of our lease agreement."

"If I don't--How do I get rid of you?"

"You must break that circle."

"The one you cleaned up?"

"Yes, but no. It has to be that circle exactly, but you must be the one to break it for it to work; in most cases. If you drew a million of them in chalk and let the rain wash them away it wouldn't mean a thing. Your hand must actively break the line."

"What do you mean by 'in most cases'?"

"There are certain exceptions to every rule, Mr.Graham. If I broke them all down into lawyer prattle we'd be here all day."

"That seems to work completely in your favor."

"There is a lot of fine print. I find it's easier just to persuade you to click 'accept'."

"I'm not easily persuaded."

"You will be, in time."

"Can you hurt anyone without my permission?"

"Mmm, that depends. If you've set me on a task then yes. I can hurt whomever I want if it will complete my task. However if I'm stagnant or in between tasks, there is very little violence I can cause directly."

"You can cause it indirectly?"

"I will be interacting physically with the world while here, Will. Not even a demon can fully predict what that may do to the world around me. If I were to be driving you to a court date and we were involved in an accident, I could very easily kill someone, though not directly through my own hand. You see?"

Will frowned as the words made him feel cold.

"Do I have control over you? Can I... stop you from doing something or send you away?"

"You only have as much control over me as you do your dogs. I am inclined to listen, but that doesn't mean I always will."

"But you just said you can't directly cause harm."

"That isn't the same as being in your control. Under the right circumstances I could leave this house. I could travel across the world, if I wanted, and there would be very little you could do to stop me."

"I couldn't summon you back here?"

"That's not how the circles work. You have summoned me into your plane of existence. That is the summoning your circles do."

"This all seems like a bad idea."

"That's what Julius Ceasar said."

Will blinked. Hannibal smiled.

"You said 'under the right circumstances' you could leave the house, meaning if those conditions aren't met you're stuck here?"

Hannibal smiled slowly, teeth visible between his lips.

"You are insightful, Mr.Graham, and correct. The one pesky little attribute of those summoning circles is that it /does/ bind us. I have a very small area of influence, wherein I can move freely without consequence, all tied to the location of that circle. The further I move out of that range, the less and less I can do, the less power I have, until I could quite literally cease to exist."

"Even if the circle is gone?" Will tilted his head slightly to eye the bare floor.

"Yes. Unless you have destroyed the circle, all the bindings stay in place."

"So you're trapped in my kitchen?"

"I'm bound to your house, Will. Let's not get excited."

Will reached up and ran his hands through his hair. Hannibal watched curiously as it did nothing to help corral the ear-length, shaggy curls. If anything it made them more rebellious. He watched Will's eyes move up to the ceiling as if he would find answers--or his old reality--among the tiles. Eventually he glanced back down. Hannibal lifted his eyebrows as a thought seemed to occur to Will. However before he could say anything, his dogs began to bark. Both men turned to the door and Will stood.

"Are you expecting company?" Hannibal purred, remaining in his seat and watching Will walk past.

"No." Will barked shortly, seeming like a dog on edge himself; hackles raised and teeth bared. Hannibal folded his hands on the table and began humming a soft tune to himself. He felt Will's eyes on the back of his head before the man moved towards his front door.

Will tapped his hands comfortingly on Winston's head--and Buster's as he attempted to leap into the air and see out the window--while he approached the door. He snorted through his nose. He knew that car. He 'tsk'ed at the dogs.

"Back up, boys. Back up." Shooing them from the door Will stepped outside, just as Jack stepped onto his porch. "Jack. What are you doing here?"

"I'm... following up on our phone conversation this morning." Jack said carefully, watching Will's sleep hazey expression.

"Our phone conversation...?"

"You don't remember, do you?" Jack frowned, wiggling his fingers as an after thought to Buster and Winston's eager faces in the window. "I called hoping to get your morning off to a good start. You sounded like you were still asleep. Either that or...?"

"Ah. No. I'm--it was just a late night." Will crossed his arms over his chest, more to keep warm then to make any kind of physical statement. Jack nodded and 'hmm'ed to himself.

"Well, do you want to get dressed then? I put everything on hold until we get back but they won't wait forever." Jack nodded inside and moved to open the door for Will. Will wasn't quick enough to stop Jack and the agent stepped inside, crouching to lavish affection on the dogs he called 'mutts' on a routine basis. And he did so without implying adoration, most of the time.

Will hesitantly stepped in behind Jack. He kept his eyes trained on the kitchen doorway.

"I'll just be a second, Jack." He tried desperately to sound nonchalant. He darted into the kitchen where he found Hannibal, sitting just as he'd left him. The men glanced at each other, Will holding a finger out at Hannibal. "Don't... do anything." He warned. He sprinted up the stairs and dressed more quickly than he ever had in his life.

Upon returning to the kitchen his heart leapt into his throat. The table was empty. He hadn't heard screaming or loud noises. Terrified of what he might find, Will turned into the main room. Jack sat on his couch, trying to deter Buster from getting in his lap. And Hannibal... Hannibal sat at the opposite end. Both men looked up and smiled as Will walked into the room.

"That was fast." Jack remarked casually. He turned to the door.

"Jack," Will started, his eyes drifting towards Hannibal. The demon continued to smile, now looking a little amused as well. Jack turned and lifted his eyebrows.

"Uh, nothing. Never mind." With his eyes suspiciously locked on Hannibal, Will dutifully followed Jack outside. He imagined nothing on the other side of his door could be as bad as what he left sitting on his couch, petting his dogs.

# twenty

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nothing worth warning about

He's young. God damnit, he's so damned young. Jack thought bitterly to himself as he stared through the one-way glass. He felt Will shifting uncomfortably beside him and wondered if the other man was having the same thoughts. The man who had turned himself in for participating in the murder of Miranda Shore was little more than a teenager. His eyes looked haunted, his skin drawn like butter spread over too much bread. He looked older than his twenty two years. Jack could only see wasted potential when he looked at him. He hoped to God they could work some kind of manipulation angle, maybe save the kid from a life behind bars. Maybe he hadn't bloodied his hands; maybe he'd just been there. It would be an easier sentence than if he'd bled the woman himself.

"He's just a kid, Jack." Will breathed quietly. He'd known. He'd felt it in the basement months ago. It was still terrible to see up close.

"You warned me." Jack parrotted, capturing Will's thoughts. "Hopefully we can use this to help other kids, before it gets too late."

The men fell silent, content to let the voice of Agent Clarice Starling fill the room from the speakers. She was one of the youngest agents under Jack's care, so to speak. She had a soft way about her that was somehow heightened by her determination. She often reminded Jack of a mother bear, viciously protecting her cubs; even though he imagined she was years off from having cubs of her own. She was talking calming to Aaron Pillfer, asking him very simple questions: Where he went to school, what his family was like, what his friends were like. Since confessing Aaron had closed up, bottled himself into an air tight container and stared ahead like he was already dead. Having Clarice talk to him, be friendly with him, try and gain his trust was their first step. The support at the bottom of the FBI structure was that they honestly wanted to help this boy, everything else piled on top but at the base of it was the desire to help. To do that--in any form--they needed to know things only Aaron could tell them.

There was a pause in conversation from the interrogation room. Will crossed his arms over his chest as he and Jack studied the face of the young man.

"You ok, Aaron?" Clarice said quietly, compassionately. "Can I get you anything? Anything at all?"

"A uh--a soda." Aaron said with the barest hint of acceptance and trust. "And... and my mom." And in three words the twenty two year old was reduced to a five year old. He was frightened, alone, stuck in a mess he didn't think he could get out of. He just wanted the comfort of his mother.

Clarice nodded slowly.

"I can do that for you, Aaron. I'll be right back."

Jack and Will turned away from the window as Clarice exited the room. Will ran his fingers into his hair with another long sigh and Jack shook his head. Clarice was wearing a frown as she joined them on the other side of the glass.

"He's starting to trust me. Starting to understand and digest everything. I uh... I'm nervous though."

"Nervous? Why?" Will prodded.

"I think he was pretty closely involved. You can practically smell the fear on him and it's--it's potent. I've started thinking it's not the fear of someone who's trapped but the fear of someone who knows exactly what's on the line. The fear of someone who did something bad, and is just now starting to realize they can't take it back."

Jack nodded.

"I think you might be right."

"At least honest guilt will help him out in court. I'm just hoping we get enough information out of him to catch the ring leader. I think if we can draw attention to a more dominant personality, we can really get him--and any other kids--the help they need."

"If he'll tell us."

"Yeah, if he'll tell us." Clarice met Will's eyes briefly. He turned back to the glass.

"Go ahead and get him what he asked for. Give him thirty minutes with mom uninterrupted. We'll regroup and plan a new strategy after that."

"Yes sir." Clarice turned on her heel.

Jack waited before turning to look at Will. He studied the uneven posture, like Will was too jumpy to get comfortable on his feet. He watched the uneven rise and fall of shoulders as breathing seemed to be a manual effort, tossed in with all the other thoughts in Will's head as if they were all so necessary. There was a glassy look to blue eyes even though they tried to maintain focus.

"What do you think?" Jack pressed, watching Will tilt his head in his direction.

"I think Clarice is on to something. I think she's right. I think this kid just got caught up with a bad crowd, but he felt good. I want to believe he just watched, but I'm starting to think we'll

match prints on a murder weapon."

"Seems like a huge over sight to have some new kid do the killing. Untested how did they know he wouldn't do exactly what he did?"

"Maybe they did know. Maybe they wanted him to come to us, Jack. We've got all our attention on this kid now. We'll be latched onto him for a while, and maybe they know that. Maybe they're counting on us getting enough false leads out of him that they'll slip further away."

"I'm torn between wishing this was all a bunch of kids, and desperately grasping at the notion that somebody older put them all up to this."

"The kids aren't all right." Will said with a slight laugh in his voice. "Kids are under a lot more pressure now-a-days than when we were younger. A lot more. We're seeing all kinds of mental disorders and anxiety disorders and social issues rise up in younger and younger kids. They feel things more significantly."

"You're worried this is the pull before the tide."

"Yeah. I'm worried this is how it all starts, not to get all apocalypse on you."

"I suppose if there's nothing we can do to stop it, we'll just have to make sure we're ready."

Will nodded and turned back to the glass. He wasn't sure he was ready to accept what was lurking in wait for him back home. It was easy to forget for a moment here or there but his thoughts always came crashing back down on him. His stomach was upset. His head ached. There was a demon in his house and demons didn't exist. Demons couldn't exist because then these killings wouldn't be just misguided youths and psychopaths... they could mean something so much worse.

# twenty one

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk of mental health issues
Mentions of doctor/patient misconduct
Suggestions of doctors misusing their power
Hints of emotional trauma
Hints of mental abuse
Hints of parental neglect

"I really didn't want to approach this topic," Jack started slowly. He paused as Will snorted.

"Then don't."

"Alana and I both think it would be best if you had a psychological evaluation." Jack tried to steel himself as Will turned to look at him. Blue eyes were sunken with suspicion, shoulders tense, breathing temporarily shallow.

"Why?" It wasn't a question Will wanted to ask because it wasn't a question he wanted answered.

"Because you killed a man less than a week ago, Will. To my knowledge that's the first man you've ever killed. That's a tough thing to get through for even the most well adjusted of men."

"And like the two of you like to keep reminding me, I'm not well adjusted."

"Just do it so we can get some sleep at night, if you won't do it for yourself."

Will laughed and shook his head. He tightened his arms over his chest, stressing the fabric. He stared off into the one-way glass for a long few moments before bothering to respond.

"Therapy doesn't work on me."

"We're not asking you to go to therapy. We're asking you to have an eval done. Different ball game. We just want to make sure we didn't knock your head off your shoulders."

"I'm familiar with most ball games, Jack, no matter how you play. And drop the 'we', /you/ want to make sure. Alana's probably called you every fifteen minutes since we got back."

"More like every thirty." Jack found himself spinning his wedding band as silence filled in the spaces between them. He could hear Alana's voice clear as a bell, berating him for letting Will get so involved without helping protect him. They were both worried about Will, he'd assured her, they just went about helping him in different ways. Jack thought that the space and solitude Alana wanted for Will was unhealthy. Alana thought the 'heroic' atmosphere Jack put Will in was unhealthy. They disagreed on many things but the one constant was their genuine love for Will, and their desire to see him safe and happy. Abigail chimed in from time to time--when Alana and Jack weren't careful enough to keep their heavily worded arguments secluded--and waffled between being on Jack's side and Alana's. Though neither of the adults wanted to admit it, she was probably more right than the both of them. What was truly best for Will Graham was probably somewhere between total involvement and total seclusion.

"Jack, the last time I let someone into my head..." Will started, his tone quiet and dark. He heard Jack nodding and mumbling in agreement.

"You had bad luck, Will. You picked the one sour apple on the tree. You can't hold all psychiatrists to that one standard."

"Well I don't really have any good examples to weigh them out against. My parents never gave any doctor a chance to do anything helpful, aside from warn them about all my potential problems. Those I've talked to through the FBI and the Academy have all been nothing but warnings about my aptitude to handle certain things and fully process what I'm seeing. Dr.Harris was the only man I spoke to on my own, trying to get a hold on things, and he really fucked me up." Will's voice snagged just a little on 'fucked'. He didn't often curse, at least, not often with 'fuck'. The word was hard on his tongue and he always felt immature that he could never give the word it's proper bite.

"You really don't have to remind me." Jack moved up to stand next to Will. They both let their attention wrap around Aaron, stoic and trying not to meet the gaze of his teary eyed mother. To anyone looking in it appeared their conversation was about the broken family before them.

"Alana and I both thought really hard about this. We both did some research and we've found a doctor we think can really help. He's got good credentials, tons of referrals. He's worked with the FBI before, with the state, on all kinds of cases. Not only can he do what you need him to do, he has a good idea of what you're going through. Kind of a 'been there, done that' type, without ever officially holding a badge."

"Thanks, /dad/, and he'll do what /you/ need him to, I'm sure." Will dropped his arms and stuffed them into his pockets. He began rubbing his thumbs over the seams in the fabric, drawing his attention to the itching softness at his thumb pad and not the buzzing in the back of his head. Not the clenching in his chest. Not the dark sense of foreboding which came on sudden and frightening like a hurricane over open water.

"At least promise me you'll /consider/ going to see Dr.Chilton?"

"I promise I'll consider it."

"Thank you. Do you think Alana will take my word for it, or should I make you call her?"

Will turned his head as Jack looked at him. His expression was blank. Jack smiled and nodded.

# twenty two

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Content that is pretty safe, all things considered

Clarice Starling frowned up and over at Jack Crawford. Her eyes had trouble locking onto the two men on the other side of the one-way glass. It made her feel uneasy. She kept watching Jack for a like reaction, but he was steely faced and hard to read as ever.

"What is it, Clarice?" Jack said after a moment of pretending he didn't feel her eyes on him. He turned his head in time to catch her looking away, cheeks slightly red.

"Nothing. I just..." She took a slow breath. "Do you think it's a good idea to have Agent Graham in there?"

"He's not technically an agent, but yes. I do. He's got a unique way of connecting with people. I feel like he'll be able to get through where you, I and Aaron's mother failed."

"With all due respect, with just a little more time I could have--"

"No, you couldn't have. You probably feel like you were close, he wanted you to. Having the capacity to murder someone in cold blood does things to a person, no matter how innocent we want them to be in the end. Even if Aaron was just an unfortunate pawn, he still participated. Killing someone changes the whole chemical way your brain works. He's manipulating all of us, maybe even without knowing it. Will needs to do this. Will's just about the only one who /can/ do this."

Clarice nodded, though heavily unsatisfied with the answer.

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Will stared across the table at the young man. He felt like he was sitting to close to the TV playing an after school special about how to chose your friends wisely. He reeked of betrayal, which was not an emotion Will thought had a smell, but now he was sure of it. Brown eyes darted up to try and meet Will's and he let them for a short second while his stomach tied itself in knots and his body burst into flames. He looked away and let out a soft sigh. The boy had heard enough of 'you picked bad friends, let me help you' for a lifetime. Will would have to try a different approach. That's what Jack was counting on, in any case.

"Aaron, I'm not... going to sugar coat this for you. Plenty of people have done that today. I'm sure you're more aware of things than you want to be, which can work against you if you let

it. You're the only person we have in custody who knows anything about this murder. You came in willingly, which means some part of you feels guilty. That's good. That means you're not..."

"A monster?" Aaron whispered, voice thick with either sorrow or anger. It was a growl that could easily be both a threat and the warning before a throat closed up with tears.

Will gave something like a nod, something like a shrug.

"Your words, Aaron. The fact is you wouldn't be here if you didn't want to make it right somehow."

"Or if I wanted credit, like--if I wanted the world to know it was me."

"/Is/ that what you want, Aaron? Do you want the world to think you're a killer? Do you want your face all over the news, and the papers with the headline: Psycho Kid Kills Helpless Woman?"

"I'm not a kid."

"Oh, you are to most of us. You will be to the media. They eat this kind of thing for breakfast. The more horrible they can make a story, the better. They'll go digging through every bit of you they can get their hands on. They'll talk to all your teachers, they'll talk to all your friends, your enemies. They'll use whatever those people say about you and they will twist it and break it and reshape it until they paint a picture of you which will represent you in the way a Picasso painting represents a real person."

Will blinked slowly as Aaron's breathing stopped. His chest suddenly seemed too heavy. His nostrils flared and he took in a long, slow breath.

"At first I thought we were just... playing, you know? Like nobody really believes this Satan worshipping shit. Ouija boards don't really work, you can't really summon a demon." Aaron paused to lick his lips. He stared at the table as if he could find his freedom there. "So I played along. I can give you the names of two of the other kids from my school who were there. They--I've known them since we were in elementary school. Not well like they weren't my friends before all this, but I knew who they were. I didn't--I didn't recognize anyone else. But this one guy he--he acted like he knew all of us. He wore a mask the whole time, I just know he was tall, maybe Mexican, he had an accent. But he scared me. The whole thing was his idea. He brought the girl. He drugged her drink. He made us all--he made us tell him what to do to her."

Will's eyebrows lifted slightly. As was usually the case once the gates were open everything came pouring out. He was right, Clarice was right, the boy felt guilty. He just had to work his way up to breaking down enough to get it all out. It had taken the better part of the day but his dam had broken. Now they had to see what they would be able to put back together with the pieces left. Will nodded gently.

"It's all right, Aaron. What you did was terrible but, you're not a monster."

"We drank her blood."

Will couldn't keep the brief change in expression off his face. He heard a strangled noise come from Aaron, and when he glanced up the boy was staring right at him. It was a stare with a kind of intensity Will found he could not look away from.

"We drank her blood and then we heard him. We heard him like... like you've heard him. I can see it. I can see it around you like a swarm of flies. Do you? Do you see?"

# twenty three

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Mentions of unwanted physical contact -- not sexual

Will tried to keep his expression passive as Jack stopped the car in his driveway. It was partially easy as he felt more exhausted than he had ever been in his whole life. His face didn't want to show any emotion and so Will encouraged the apathy. There was a brief moment or two of silence before Will felt Jack take in a breath.

"I might have a few over-due rom coms in the back, if you need to watch something ridiculous to take your mind off today, so you can sleep easier."

"I appreciate the thought but my mind stays where my mind wants. Sleeping isn't something that comes naturally to me. No point in trying to bargain with it." Will felt Jack nod. He turned his head as the other man shifted in his seat to pull out his wallet. He flipped through and slid out a small, silver business card. He passed it to Will.

"Think about it. You promised you'd consider it. Alana and I have only spoken to Dr.Chilton briefly, just enough to let him know you might be calling him for an eval. Everything else is up to you."

"You pre-made my appointment for me?"

"I didn't say that."

Will ran his fingers over the raised text on the card, a dark blue color. He frowned. Dr.Frederick Chilton, Head of Psychiatric Assistance for the Baltimore State Long Term Mental Institution. It made Will's stomach knot up tighter and tighter. He looked at Jack and made a pointed gesture of placing the card in his back pocket. Jack nodded.

"We got enough out of Aaron--thanks to you--to keep us busy for a few days. Since we don't technically employ you, keep in touch. No use coming in when you'll just be standing there watching us run around like headless chickens. If we get any good leads, we'll call you. I'll call you."

"Thanks for the ride, Jack."

"It's the least I can do, Will. Remember to eat dinner, please?"

Will waved dismissively as he exited the car. He rounded the front, feeling open and exposed in the headlights, and turned towards his tiny house. He was part way through unlocking the door as Jack's tires purred on the gravel. Will tried to enjoy the sound. He pushed open his door expectantly.

A scowl settled on his face as his dogs were not at the door to greet him. He did not have to look far for them though, they were curled up near the fireplace on nicely cleaned beds. Buster was gone to the world in slumber, but Winston managed a tired wag of his tail. Usually the dogs were immediately on him when he came home. They'd been left alone all day and they obviously needed out and fed... but not tonight.

Will slowly moved his gaze further into the room and found the culprit. Still posed as if he would catch something from Will's clothing, Hannibal sat in his reading chair, facing the door. He was thumbing through a copy of Twilight Will wasn't sure he owned. He recalled Abigail unpacking her bags months ago, and assumed it must have belonged to her. He tried to swallow his disappointment and found Hannibal gazing lazily at him from over the book.

"If this is what passes for literature now-a-days, I'd just as soon have you return me to my own plane of existence, thank you."

"That depends on who you ask." Will grumbled, moving into the kitchen. He tossed his jacket and keys at the bed as he walked by. While pulling out a glass for whiskey he could hear Hannibal milling about in the other room. Glancing over his shoulder he watched the demon hang the jacket in a nearby closet. Will turned back to the task at hand.

"Pleasant day at work?" Hannibal purred, now in the kitchen and far too close for Will's comfort.

Will pulled away from the air near to Hannibal as if worried /he/ might catch something from the demon. He saw the shadow of the man move back towards the table.

"We are so touchy, Mr.Graham."

"First of all, you're a demon. Anyone in their right mind would be avoiding physical contact with you."

"Depends on why they summoned me." Hannibal's voice was pure cane sugar.

"Second, I don't like physical contact from anyone, let alone you."

"Oh?" Hannibal's interest seemed piqued. He lifted his eyebrows as he sat at the table. It almost seemed routine. All their conversations were to happen here, in the kitchen, over a finger of whiskey. For Will, at least, heaven forbid he offer anything to Hannibal.

"I don't want to go into detail. It's just... distracting. I touch me all the time, I don't need anyone else living the experience. I try to keep my physical self locked away since I can't very well keep my mind to myself with Jack Crawford breathing down my neck."

"Sounds like something of a problem."

"I'm not sure I'd call Jack a problem, per say. He's just... over bearing. I think he means well. Alana too. They just have trouble seeing things from my point of view. Or I can see things from their point of view too easily? I don't know. Details get fuzzy if I think on it too long."

"Is there something I can help you with, Will?"

Will paused mid-pour. He glanced up at the dark window over his sink, gazing at the smug reflection which stared back at him from the table. He capped the whiskey, set down the bottle and turned. He found Hannibal exactly as the window had displayed him--smug. Will narrowed his eyes.

"I'm not playing your game."

"It's not a game, Will. That implies an equal chance of winning on both sides. Accepting my help assures you a win."

"No."

Hannibal sighed, a long suffering sigh, the sigh of a mother tired of warning her child against the same course of action. The sigh of someone who had just laid out all the options and they were all refused. Again. Hannibal sat back in his chair but it was a poised, classy lean and nothing like Will's hunched, nearly barbaric posture. He tapped the table with two long fingers and then folded his hands in his lap.

"I explained all this to you the other night, Mr.Graham. If you still don't intent to set me to a task, why not release me? I'm not doing either of us any good just sitting here. Though, perhaps I am good for your dogs."

Will's eyes quickly shot towards the doorway to the other room.

"Relax. I haven't done anything sinister. I fed them, walked them as far as I could, and entertained them for the better part of the afternoon. It does get quite lonely in this little house during the day without adequate company."

"I'm not adequate company."

"How wrong you are." Hannibal watched as Will picked up his glass, and slowly--almost reluctantly--joined him at the table. "It seems life has spent your time teaching you how wrong you are. I won't presume to do the same. I'll simply say that I have met many more men than you are ever likely to, and I already count you among a small group of them I consider more than adequate company."

"In any other situation, I may be flattered."

"But because I'm a demon, you're not?"

"Because you're a demon I wonder what that says about me." Will glanced up and caught a very small twitch of Hannibal's lips. A smirk or a frown he wasn't sure. He cupped his glass of whiskey and leaned forward. He could feel Hannibal watching him, knowing he was about to speak, curious about what he would say.

"Is there..." Will paused, chewing on his lip for a second, "can someone tell if you've summoned a demon?"

"That's a question vague enough to be one of my answers."

"Could someone look at me and tell that I've summoned you, that I've talked with you? That I'm still, currently, talking to you?"

"A special kind of someone could, yes." Hannibal tilted his head to the side, corner of his eye twitching at his unruly hair. He really needed to find a barber, quickly.

"How?"

"With their eyes."

"I don't have the patience for your bullshit."

"There is a certain kind of... glow around people who have touched the other planes. It presents itself differently from person to person, for various reasons, but it is noticeable if you know what to look for or if you have seen it before. Normal people won't be able to see you for what you are, Mr.Graham. So unless your Jack Crawford has a demonic house guest he's not telling you about, he'll never know."

"That's not... who I meant." Will leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, tipping his head back.

What would it hurt to tell the damned demon? It wasn't like he could do anything about it while he was on lock down in Will's house.

"A young man turned himself into the police. Said he was involved with one of the murders we've been investigating. I--talked to him and he... said he knew I had heard you. He said I heard you like he'd heard you. Everyone else blew it off as crazy just being crazy, but I know better."

"I'm not sure if you do, Will." Hannibal stood and moved to the stove. "You're the only person I've talked to in about four hundred years."

Will turned his head quickly to the demon. He watched the stretch of Hannibal's back as pots, pans and other various cooking utensils were pulled down and prepped.

"Then, you're telling me this kid was just crazy?" Will's voice was soft. "But they used the same damned circle I did. I can't--I can't believe they were all flukes and yet somehow I managed to pull you through."

"Stranger things have happened, but I'll offer you this: The inexperienced have no way of knowing with whom you've spoken to or seen. Your suspect could have very easily talked with another demon, seen another demon, and recognized that in you. He may not be able to see the subtle differences to illustrate it was a different demon. If he watched the change happen among his companions--watched as they went from blind to seeing, or deaf to hearing

as the case may be--he would know what to look for in others who have seen or heard. He might have just misunderstood. Thought you heard what he heard."

"You're telling me there could be more than one demon working here?" Will was taken aback by Hannibal's sudden laughter. It was short, high and joyful.

"My dear Will," he turned, face dark as steam rose behind him from the stove, "at any given time there are roughly seventy thousand demons roaming the United States. And that's only the ones bound, not taking into account those freed or here on their own power. You're not just dealing with three or four demons, I'll bet. You're probably dealing with a dozen. Problem is they seem to be organizing. Your problem might actually be the demon you don't see, the devil you don't know, versus the ones walking among you."

# twenty four

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nothing awful

*"William... William get up!" The voice was warm, easily measured on a thermometer. It softly buzzed against Will's young eyes. "William!" The voice carried a laugh, a secretive laugh. Matthew Graham reached out and gently shook his son's shoulder. He pushed a few more times until bleary blue eyes stared up at him.*

*"C'mon. Get up. We've only got a few minutes. I've packed for the day." He reached out and ruffled Will's unruly hair. The hair made him ache just slightly; it was so much like his mother's hair.*

*Will bolted quickly out of bed, throwing back the covers and leaping to his feet. He discarded his pajamas and began searching through his drawers for suitable clothes. He'd learned that no matter how hot and sunny it was that it was always colder over the water. He'd learned that a jacket was better than a long sleeve shirt: A jacket could be removed to pull up wet and wiggling fish so it would stay dry. He darted out of his room and down the hall. He could see his father kneeling by the door, packing away the last of their equipment.*

*As Will moved forward he paused outside his mother's room. He could hear the machines beeping, steady, the only lullaby she'd ever sung him. He frowned, facing the door. He heard his father call his name in a hushed whisper.*

*"Are you sure we shouldn't wake her up this time?" Will whispered as his father opened the front door. "She doesn't like it when we're not here when she wakes up."*

*"It's better like this, William. Better for everyone. Let's not talk about it. There's a full day of fishing ahead of us!" Matthew's smile was horrifically contagious. Will smiled up at eyes just like his and nodded.*

*William and Matthew left the apartment, leaving Will and Madeline behind. One was the ghost of a person, the other a person like a ghost.*

"Will? You cannot possibly still be asleep. Will."

Will's eyes slowly drifted open. The moment his mind was able to register what was in front of him his heart clenched and nearly stopped. Hannibal was leaning over him, having apparently shaken him to get him to wake. The demon nodded, lips in a thin line that looked despairingly like disappointment. Will sat up.

"Good. Get dressed. I made breakfast. We need to talk."

Will felt a pit in his stomach, lodged firmly against the wall of his gut. It burned and burrowed its way further down. He'd never been in any kind of romantic relationship but he imagined this was the sensation most men got when their girlfriends muttered those words. It was an altogether disquieting thought. On autopilot he did as was requested of him. He dressed lazily, as if preparing for a day around the house, and joined Hannibal in the kitchen. He sat down as the demon set a plate in front of him. Folding a hand towel--and where he'd gotten that Will didn't know--and returned with a plate of his own.

"I'll get directly to the point: since you won't lay any ground rules, I will."

Will blinked, fork halfway to his mouth. Hannibal's face was drawn in dark lines, professional lines, almost angry lines.

"Ground rules?"

"You do not want to set me on a task, at least not in the way that our bond requires. Yet you continue to ask me questions and expect me to answer. I have played along with you, hoping to gain your trust, hoping to find you amicable to seeing the opportunity before you. Blind or just stubborn, you have not."

Will tightened his grip on his fork. Could he fight off a demon? What kind of powers did Hannibal have? He looked just like a normal man but that couldn't be the whole truth. Would he have to change form to access powers other than the mundane? Would Will have to fight that giant, multi-armed creature he had seen glimpses of in his kitchen?

"I will continue to answer your questions without a designated task. I will continue to adhere to our bond and not attempt to break it in the many ways at my disposal to do so. I will continue to be friendly, social and as helpful as I feel the urge to be. In return," Hannibal set down his fork and glanced across the table at Will. "I will show you how to take me outside my current bounds as I am not eager to spend any more time alone here with your dogs. Secondly you are in desperate need of better food. While I am here I am mostly mortal and I am hesitant to put most food into my body considering how you animals prepare it now-a-days. Third I will need to have my own wardrobe as yours is severely lacking, also it is yours and I am sure you are no more keen that I wear your clothes than I am."

Will paused. His body relaxed slightly, hackles down, as he realized Hannibal had no intention of harming him. He slowly glanced up and met maroon eyes.

"You... want me to take you shopping?"

"Yes."

# twenty five

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Hannibal being a little shit

"And so this is going to let you leave the house? Go outside whatever fence started in the kitchen?"

"Yes. It will make a smaller barrier, a travel-size barrier, if you will. When this is with you, I can be with you. I can leave the house. I can draw on the power of the circle to interact with the outside world instead of drawing on my own limited power."

"But you don't have to interact, do you?" Will rubbed his thumb over the strip of fabric. He had stitched the circle in red thread--Hannibal insisted the color of the thread didn't matter, Will was feeling poetic and decided red was the only suitable color--and by proxy had created another summoning circle. One that could be slipped into Will's pocket or wallet. "You didn't let Jack see you when he was here."

"No, I didn't. I could tell you both had something very important to do, I didn't want to pester you with anything else." Hannibal sounded entirely sincere, smiling like an imp. He frowned as he searched through the closet where he'd hung all of Will's jackets. None of them were really suitable but the weather was too cold to go without. Groaning, Hannibal selected one.

"I'm not going to thank you."

"I wasn't expecting it." Hannibal grinned. He moved towards the front door and held it open, ushering Will out. "Now, this area has changed a great deal since I was last here, so I will have to trust that you can find me suitable vendors."

"Suitable for your needs and suitable for my wallet are two very different things." Will ran his finger over the length of his car key. He was intrigued by how casually this all seemed, though his head still buzzed.

"Do not worry about money, Will. As I have said before, there are benefits to being what I am." Will watched Hannibal's smile as he slipped into the passenger's seat like he'd always been riding there. Will felt decidedly more out of place.

Will drove them down a road he was unfamiliar with, to a place he was unfamiliar with, with a man he was unfamiliar with and he numbed himself on how familiar it felt. As he put the car in park outside Nordstrom's he gripped the steering wheel, white knuckled. He heard Hannibal shift slightly in his seat, clearly giving the place look over. Will could almost feel

Hannibal's sigh of 'I suppose this will work', though the demon did not say anything. After another second of silence Will could feel Hannibal's eyes on him.

"Will?"

"Sorry I just," Will paused, unable to catch the strange look on Hannibal's face as he apologized, "I don't do 'people' well. I just need to prepare a moment first."

"Take all the time you need, but consider that I may be able to help you relax."

"I'm not going to task you with keeping me sane in a crowd of people. You'll kill them all." Will glanced over at Hannibal and frowned.

"Not until after I've done my shopping."

Will's face hardened, Hannibal maintained a grin.

Will shoved the keys deep into his pocket as he and Hannibal approached the department store. Hannibal carried himself like royalty settled on the guise of someone beneath his own station. It was almost as if he was keen to try on a new role but not so eager once he saw the costuming department. If this wasn't fancy enough for him, Will wasn't sure what Hannibal had been expecting. New York level designer shops? In Virginia? What a joke.

Will felt a strange tingle as Hannibal once more held the door open for him. He rubbed his thumb obsessively over the circle in his pocket. He did notice this time a small twitch of Hannibal's mouth in response. He narrowed his eyes but did not feel the need to experiment just yet. He followed Hannibal around for the better part of two hours, they circled the men's section at least twice. Hannibal would occasionally stop and inspect something, then crinkle his nose and move on. About the third time around Will could tell Hannibal had lowered his standards. He filled his arms--and Will's--with a menagerie of clothes and led them towards the dressing rooms. After a brief pause to bemoan having no tailors on order for his assistance, Hannibal took the garments and presumably had a private fashion show behind the stall door. Will found himself in a small sitting area near the dressing room, yet again sympathizing with men and their shop-a-holic girlfriends. He knew it was a stereotype--clearly, as apparently the same condition plagued demons--but it felt good, normal to let himself down that road of thought.

Hannibal did appear to be in better spirits as they approached the cash register.

"Wow! I was going to ask if you found everything you needed, but it's apparent that you did. Great!" The cheerful cashier exclaimed, patting the register for the men to deposit the clothes. Will was almost impressed by Hannibal's restraint at the display.

"Indeed we did." Hannibal said politely. Will caught a hint of a grimace, as if Hannibal were in a great deal of pain, as the woman began ringing items up and placing them in a bag. Will wasn't sure what kind of treatment Hannibal was expecting to be given to his clothes, but this was far from it. It was almost amusing. Will felt himself smiling.

"You have got a great sense of style. I wish /my/ husband dressed like this." The woman said, grinning up at Will. It took him a second to process what she'd said. His protest was halted by Hannibal's hand on his forearm, gently, just a simple urging for him to remain quiet. Against everything screaming and rampaging in his head, Will obeyed.

"I may make a civilized man out of him yet." Hannibal joked, swallowing whatever hurt pride he had left over being forced to shop at such a place. At the very least it would be noticeably better than what he had been forced to wear as of late. And it wouldn't smell of dogs.

As the woman read the total Will felt his heart clench for the thousandth time that day. He couldn't recall the last time he had spent that much on anything, let alone clothes. He recalled Hannibal assuring him that money was not a problem. He had only a second to wonder what he meant as Hannibal pulled a wallet from his pocket. He happily declared 'charge' as the method of payment, and slipped the woman an American Express Gold Card...

Because of course he did.

Will was surprised and relieved that he was not tasked with carrying out all of Hannibal's bags, just half. They loaded them into the car and Hannibal happily claimed his seat. Will frowned over at him.

"I'm surprised you didn't want to stop at the bathroom to change right there." He sighed, starting the engine.

"No need." Hannibal purred smugly. As Will turned to look at him, Hannibal snapped. Will recoiled, blinking furiously as Hannibal now wore a three piece suit. The demon looked like a fashion model, which confirmed Will's suspicions about what had happened in the stall. He didn't like the way his mouth went dry.

"Where to next?" Hannibal smiled. Will's eye twitched.

# twenty six

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

A disassociative episode
Anxiety
Social anxiety

Will shoved his hands into his pockets, feeling his palms go clammy all at once. Nordstrom's had been blessedly empty, Whole Foods was decidedly the opposite of that. Half way through the parking lot and Will could already feel the walls closing in on him. He didn't want to be here, damnit, this was the last place he wanted to be. He felt like everyone turned to watch him, heads rolling backwards like owls, eyes locked onto him as if they could see right into his skull. As if everyone were aware there was something wrong back there, something innately wrong with Will. He wanted to sink into the earth. He wanted to hide and never see the sun again. Each passing conversation, each unhappy child, each clatter of shopping carts made his heart pound that much faster.

"Will," Hannibal called, "do you prefer fish or red meat?"

Will turned to look at Hannibal. He had to admit there was something calming in the way Hannibal looked in his 'fancy' clothes. It almost made him seem out of place, but at the same time Hannibal now radiated a kind of comfort that was almost contagious. Will found he had forgotten the question.

"What?"

"You don't usually shop here, do you?" Hannibal settled, leading them into the store with a cart empty and waiting.

"Uh no. I usually shop at gas stations and convenience stores when no one else is awake, or around. This is... almost exactly the opposite of how I do my shopping." Will felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. There were so many people inside it seemed like the whole building was moving. He tried to keep his eyes focused on one thing, but they kept blurring out all the details. He felt like he was wading through waist-deep mud.

"I'll need to really stock up then if I'm somehow going to replace your staple foods of bread, water and whiskey."

Will frowned over at Hannibal, the demon in sharp focus.

"For someone who is apparently bond to me, owes their new-found freedom to me, you're certainly a smart ass."

"Everyone has their faults, dear Will. I do not count my scathing wit among my own."

"Oh? And what do you consider your faults?"

"I'm afraid you're two or three circles outside the privilege of that knowledge." Hannibal turned to smirk at Will. He caught Will's eyebrows raise, caught the recognition of a joke, and then a soft tug at one corner of his mouth. He tried to fight a smile. But, for the moment at least, he was not pushing away the crowd. His attention was on Hannibal and his heart rate slowed, his breathing became more regulated.

"Where did you learn how to cook anyway?"

"I was once summoned by a master chef in France, in fact, he was my last summoner. His small shop had gotten far busier than he could handle on his own, but he was a paranoid, neurotic man. He couldn't trust anyone else to help him run the place. He kept firing his wait staff and other cooks. Eventually he was led to me. He tasked me with assisting for years. When he was on his death bed he pleaded to me to keep the place going, to keep his name in lights. I assured him I would." Hannibal paused. Will watched a slight change of expression reflect back at him from the butcher's glass. "Promises and bonds don't hold after the death of a mortal, but he didn't need to know that."

"You... regret doing that, don't you?"

Hannibal paused and turned to look over his shoulder at Will.

"I suppose. Wouldn't you? It was odd work, to say the least, but it was work. I had a specific purpose, and the things I learned will benefit me and my future summoners greatly. I mostly regret that his last words were to a strange creature with whom he shared no blood. He had family, you see, but he couldn't trust any of them." Hannibal shrugged softly. "Nothing to be done about it."

"You could have told him the truth."

"To what end? He would have died in sorrow, knowing his lack of trust in his fellow man was his downfall, knowing that he would leave no legacy, that no one would remember him. At least this way he died thinking he'd done right."

"That's almost noble."

"You still sound so surprised. Didn't I tell you not to stereotype?"

Will crossed his arms over his chest. He was vaguely aware of people behind him, people around him, going about their business, but it wasn't as pressing an issue any more. He side stepped once or twice when someone got too close--feeling like he'd probably have a breakdown of some variety if anyone bumped into him--but he didn't feel the panic he usually felt in these kinds of situations. He calmly watched as Hannibal discussed certain cuts

of meat with the butcher. He was clearly making the butcher's day, as the man smiled genuinely and seemed eager to take up more of Hannibal's time. Their conversation ended up with multiple slabs of packaged meat being laid gently into the shopping cart. Will couldn't identify half of them, let alone imagine what Hannibal thought they were going to do with so much food.

Will followed Hannibal dutifully around the store. He eventually lost interest in trying to catalogue everything that went into the cart, a process which was often halted when he realized he had no idea /what/ that thing had even been. While he had just hours before felt like a man trailing his woman, now he felt like a child shackled to his mother. He followed along a few steps behind Hannibal, arms over his chest, and unwilling to participate in what he deemed was an unnecessary ritual. Food was food. You could buy it practically ready to eat, who had the time or energy to make everything from scratch?

A demon, it seemed.

As Will followed Hannibal into yet another aisle full of spices and herbs--none of which Will imagined you could smoke--he felt a buzzing in the back of his head. He closed his eyes and tried to will it away, but he only managed to dull the sensation. He lifted his head and opened his eyes slowly, watching as hooves walked slowly away from him. He let his eyes trail the large stag as it moved through the aisle as if it belonged there. It stopped at the end cap and turned, looking over it's shoulder at Will. It perked it's ears and snorted through flared nostrils.

"Will?"

Snapping his head in the other direction Will felt his heart miss two beats. Abigail stood--basket in her arms and Alana at her back--on the other end of the aisle. "Did hell freeze over?" She joked, leading Alana right towards him.

Will parted his mouth to speak but couldn't find the words. Irrationally he imagined Hannibal standing ten feet tall behind him, six arms flailing in smoke and fire, cackling as he declared Will responsible for the end of the world.

"I uh..."

"I thought you only shopped at like, 7-11? And at like three in the morning." Abigail joked, she shifted the basket on her arm and met Will's eyes. She waited until he gave a slight nod and then she moved in to hug him quickly. He felt his body tingle as she pulled away.

"Are you here alone?" Alana pushed, eyes moving from Will to Hannibal as he stood from a crouch and deposited a bottle of thyme into the cart. He smiled over at her. Will blinked and glanced over at Hannibal as if he'd never seen him before.

"I'm a friend of Will's." Hannibal provided, stepping forward and holding out a hand. "Just in town for a little while. Trying to ensure he eats something other than hot dogs while I'm here."

"Good luck, Mr...?" Alana said with a smile, shaking Hannibal's hand.

"Just Hannibal, is fine."

"I thought we were Will's only friends." Abigail joked, grinning up at Will.

Voices slowly became a soft ringing in Will's ears. His eyes drifted lazily from Abigail to Hannibal, to Alana and back. They smiled, they gestured and Will stood among them. He decided that didn't feel right, and so he turned and stepped out of himself. He turned back around and watched as his body remained fairly lucid. He didn't appear to be talking, but his face was not expressionless, he seemed to occasionally react to what was said. He was Will, watching William, like all those years ago. He felt a twirling in his stomach like driving down a hill too fast, and he watched passively as William's feet buckled from under him. Abigail and Alana moved forward in slow motion, but Hannibal was closer. Will's vision faded, blurry except for Alana and Abigail. He could see their faces both from the side as Will and the front as William. They melded into a strange form of reality. He could not longer see behind William as Hannibal gently lowered him to the floor, but he could feel a warm chest at his back, strong arms around his sides. It was his mind forming a picture of his world through sensation as well as sight.

He felt bad for William, so lost in something that he'd simply toppled over. He wanted to think he had stronger roots than that, but he was William and so that was obviously not true.

He wanted to lean into the warmth at his back and fall asleep. It seemed like as good a place as any to just give in to the exhaustion he'd been trying to keep at bay. His mind provided him with the warning that the person providing that warmth was not to be trusted. Confused, Will turned to look at the fuzzy world behind William, a world he could feel but not see. With a clap like thunder the man holding him became vividly clear. Staring over at Will and down at William simultaneously, the man in the green parka crouched. Too close.

"You see?" He whispered. He watched as the man pressed a book into William's chest. Will looked down and found himself holding the book to his own body. It began to burn like ash under his fingers.

"You see?" The man repeated. "You see?!"

# twenty seven

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk about sexual relationships
Talk about sex
Talk about sexual orientation
If you squint, a hint of eating disorder mention

Alana stepped back and held the door open wide, permitting Hannibal through. He carried Will nearly effortlessly and--she'd noticed--tenderly. Abigail ahead of her moved a few things around on Will's bed and stepped back. Hannibal gently laid the man atop the blankets, pausing to remove his glasses and set them on the side table. Standing back up Alana could hear Hannibal sigh heavily.

"This is mostly my fault. I should have insisted he stay here."

Alana closed the doors, pausing to scratch Winston behind the ears in comfort. Buster moved immediately onto the bed, sniffing Will over eagerly, worried.

"You can't predict an episode, Hannibal." Alana said carefully, feeling strange calling the man by his first name after only having met him an hour ago.

"Perhaps not, but I saw the signs. I suppose I chose to ignore them, selfishly. I was enjoying our day out."

Abigail crouched to appease Winston. She buried her face into his warm fur and sighed, ignoring the door opening and closing as Alana and Hannibal brought in the groceries. She glanced up as Hannibal walked by with a bag from Nordstrom's.

"Wow. You really /did/ take him out of his comfort zone, didn't you?"

"Abigail." Alana admonished.

"Sometimes it can be beneficial to go outside one's comfort zone, properly supervised and with friends, of course." Hannibal supplied quickly, seemingly not effected by Abigail's words. Alana frowned, staring at Will. Her eyes moved back to Hannibal as Abigail moved to sit on the end of Will's bed. There was something strange about him and Alana couldn't put her finger on it. She could not get over the sensation that it was alarming that Will had never mentioned Hannibal before. According to Hannibal they'd been friends for some time--though had recently lost contact--but were apparently close enough that Hannibal staying with Will for a few weeks was nothing. Alana's suspicions deepened as she recalled that Will

did not have a guest room, and had only one bed. Buster and Winston seemed to enjoy Hannibal's company, at least, and that quieted her mind enough for the time being.

"Why don't you two come sit in the kitchen? I'll make us some tea and we can wait for Will."

Alana watched as Abigail slowly moved into the kitchen. The girl didn't want to look at Hannibal, maybe she had the same reservations as Alana. The dark haired woman sat across from Abigail and flashed her a small smile. It wasn't returned.

"Are you all right, Abigail?" Alana prodded, aware Hannibal was glancing over at them every few seconds.

"I'm just... worried about Will."

"We all are." Hannibal offered, sincerity ringing in his voice, his expression. "But he's home now, with friends. He's safe. Once he's awake we can make sure he's fully aware of himself, and let him get some sleep."

"Hannibal's right," Alana reached over and put a hand on top of Abigail's, "Will is safe now."

Abigail frowned. Alana could see the rebellion in her young eyes and opened her mouth to warn her, but Abigail was not to be stopped.

"Are you sleeping here? In Will's house?" Abigail said quickly, accusation sharp in her words.

"Of course. Will was nice enough to--"

"Where?"

"Abigail!"

"No. I want him to tell me. Where are you sleeping?"

Hannibal seemed to falter under Abigail's gaze. Alana kept her face set as if scolding Abigail, but her attention was on Hannibal. He sighed and glanced into the other room momentarily.

"Will and I take turns sleeping on the couch." He answered, voice soft. "I assure you I am not here to cause Will any more strain than he is already under. We are friends, old friends, and that is all."

Abigail turned away. Alana nodded. Hannibal seemed put out but calm enough to her. While Abigail still radiated anger, Alana could feel herself calming down, warming up to Will's strange friend.

"Will is fully capable of making his own decisions, but I think he knows as well as anyone that a romantic endeavor would be a bad idea. He is not in a state to devote so much of himself to someone else. I'm just here to take some of the work off him, for a little while, until I return home."

"What do you do?" Abigail asked, at least attempting to be polite. Her eyes were glued to the table.

"I'm a chef."

"Will's friends with a chef?" Abigail said, and she was unable to keep a genuine smile from her face. "Yeah right. Gourmet to Will is like..."

"Really expensive hotdogs." Alana laughed. The innuendo didn't hit her until a moment later, at which point she cleared her throat.

"Part of the reason why I insisted upon staying with him during my visit. What you eat can not only effect your physical health, but your mental well being. Left to his own devices Will tends to not eat for an entire day. I won't have it." Hannibal grinned, moving through the tiny kitchen with ease. He pulled back a little, feeling both women soften to his presence.

"So... are you gay?"

"Abigail!" Alana said, immediately feeling like a mother. Hannibal chuckled softly over both of them, facing the sink.

"No. I don't put labels on myself like that. Love is a beautiful thing and when it presents itself to me I will be ready for it, no matter what physical form it happens to inhabit."

"Rude." Alana hissed at Abigail. The girl just shrugged, then turned her eyes to Alana.

"Is /Will/ gay?" When she received an incredulous look, Abigail sighed. "Look you and I were /both/ thinking the same thing when Hannibal led us in here, and it wasn't 'well Will isn't gay.' You've known him longer than me. I'm sure he's told you more about... stuff. Is he gay?"

"No, Abigail I--I don't know." Alana amended. "This seems like an entirely inappropriate conversation to be having while he's fighting off an episode in the next room."

"Well it's not like he's going to tell me."

"Have you asked him?"

"No!"

"I think it would be safest to leave all talk of romantic entanglement out of the conversation for now. We need things to be calm and routine for Will, no use throwing any wrenches in his wheels." Hannibal set down two cups of tea, nodding to both Alana and Abigail. He returned to the kitchen and began putting away what he had purchased.

"You both act like being in a relationship is a bad thing. Wouldn't it be good for him? I mean he'd have someone to talk to, someone who understood him and was there for him, right?"

"Relationships are more complicated than that, Abigail." Alana said knowingly, wrapping her hands around the warm cup in front of her. "You have to be willing to give as good as you get

for the relationship to work. The place... the place that Will is at mentally right now doesn't work with that. He doesn't have any more of himself to give. He's all tapped out. Starting a relationship in that state of mind will just compound things. He'll try too hard, he'll run out of everything he has left, and then he'll feel guilty, and then abandoned. It's just--he's really not in a good place for it. He's got friends. He's got good friends. That's what we're here for. We can be his support without needing him to give us anything back."

"And you don't think sex would be good for him? Really?" Abigail lifted her eyebrows. Hannibal laughed from the cabinets as Alana bit back a slight gasp.

"The girl's got spunk." Hannibal chuckled, turning. "Sex can be a beautiful tool, but it can also be a beautiful weapon. In some situations I think sex could certainly be a big help, but that's not what Will needs right now. In fact, I would wager a bet that with everything going on in his head right now, sex is the furthest thing from his mind."

"I still think--wow--that this is incredibly inappropriate." Alana whispered in a tiny voice, sipping her tea.

"Sex is a healthy activity, Alana." Abigail pressed, grinning.

"It can be." Alana sighed, and then shook her head. "No, changing the topic. How long have you known Will, Hannibal?"

"Oh? Mmm, I would say the better part of fifteen years now. I get lost in the dates sometimes. I'm sure he could tell you exactly."

"How'd you meet?" Abigail said as she turned to pet Buster. Winston had hopped into bed with Will, not to be moved until he woke, but Buster couldn't sit still long enough to mope and worry.

"At a boatyard, of all places. He had every reason to be there, but I did not. I was having an argument with the man who supplied the fish to the man I worked for."

"You met his father then?" Alana said, rather suddenly, turning her full attention to Hannibal. She didn't like the look on his face.

"I'm afraid I will leave the rest of the story to Will, Alana. He is very closed about his family. I would not want to overstep my boundaries and tell you anything he would not wish you to know."

"I understand." Alana said with a firm nod. Disappointed. Maybe that was why Will never mentioned Hannibal--Hannibal knew more about Will than he wanted the rest of his friends to know. Maybe he worried something would get out if Hannibal were around, something he wanted to keep locked up. Alana tapped her finger against her still warm teacup.

"So what kinds of things can you cook?" Abigail questioned. Hannibal paused, having packed everything away, and took off his jacket. He rolled up his sleeves and smiled.

"Just about anything." He said humbly, it was true, and why deny it. "Provided I have the correct ingredients."

# twenty eight

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Vague hints that this was once a dark, triggering, adult piece

Will slowly blinked open his eyes. In his mind he could hear the ticking of an analog clock though he knew he didn't have any in the house. It was a soft, peaceful way to return to the waking world. He let it lull him into a peaceful state as he worked his eyes open further and further. The room before him was dark, the bed behind him warm with Buster and Winston. He let his eyes scan the room and it's soft, blue darkness, finding two figures on either end of his couch, and a third... close to his bed in an armchair.

"How are you feeling, Will?" Hannibal asked in a soft whisper. Will tilted his head on the pillow to look at him.

"Like I ran a 50k."

"I'd say, respectfully, in your current physical state that would be entirely impossible." Hannibal's smirk was barely visible in the dim light. He leaned forward. "Abigail and Alana are asleep on the couch. They insisted they stay until you woke up." His eyes traced over Will as the other man slowly pushed himself up onto his elbows. "Can I get you a glass of water? Aspirin?"

"Uh, y-yes. Thank you." Will whispered hoarsely. He nodded and felt a strange need to smile back as Hannibal offered the expression to him. The demon patted the bed gently in lieu of touching Will's shoulder and stepped into the kitchen.

Will rubbed at his face and sat up. He turned and 'shh'ed his dogs as they were both roused. Buster was immediately in his lap and Winston was just as quickly pressed to his side. Will smiled, tired but genuine and lavished affection on them both. He frowned as he shifted in the clothes he'd been wearing too long, but then recalled Abigail and Alana sleeping on the couch and was grateful for it. He had the momentary thought that to have woken up in any clothes other than these meant Hannibal would have had to undress him, and didn't want to think long on the consequences or feelings or associations that might come along with such a situation.

"Hey, you," Alana said, voice thick with sleep as she opened her eyes and glanced towards the bed. Winston and Buster's movements clearly indicating that Will was under them somewhere, awake. She slowly set aside the covers, pausing to ensure she hadn't woken Abigail. She moved to sit on the end of the bed.

"You feeling all right?"

"I suppose, I guess. I'm myself, I know where I am." Will said from behind Buster. He shoved the dog politely aside and moved to lean on the back wall. "I'm embarrassed, mostly."

"There's nothing to be embarrassed about." Alana said confidently, turning as Hannibal walked quietly back into the room. She watched the casual passing of aspirin and water from one man to the other. She felt foolish for having doubted Hannibal's intentions earlier, the men clearly had a knowledge of each other that could only have come from years of friendship.

"Thank you." Will said quietly, sliding the pills easily onto his tongue.

"I feel like I should apologize, Will." Hannibal said as he took his seat, putting him adjacent to Alana. Their forms blurred in the dark room under Will's tired gaze.

"For what?"

"I should not have pushed you so far today. I could tell you were uneasy and yet I insisted we press on. I should have considered your feelings more deeply. I should not have put you in that situation."

"You didn't put me in any situation I didn't get myself into, Hannibal." Will said, a little shortly. Alana frowned at him.

"He feels bad, Will, don't be angry at him."

"I'm not... I'm not angry. I just don't like it when people assume responsibility for things I'm responsible for."

"Would you have been out today, had I not requested it?"

Will frowned. He glanced over at Hannibal, at eyes that burned like coal in the dark. He looked away.

"No."

"Then I have a right to my guilt, as you have a right to be offended. I'll make you something special for breakfast and we can move past this like adults."

Will scoffed and nodded, setting his glass of water on the nightstand beside him. He rolled his stiff shoulder--and then realized the injury he should have there was still /not/ there--and frowned hard at the bed.

"This is another reason why you should call Dr.Chilton, Will." Alana pressed very gently. "Jack told me he gave you the card, and that you promised to consider it."

"He did, and I did. I've been a little too preoccupied recently to make any moves though." Will let Buster slide back under his hands. He didn't enjoy the silence that fell over them, it

was an awkward silence, and those turned his stomach to acid. He didn't want to be the one to break this lapse, however, and so he willed himself to hang on.

"Should we wake Abigail?" Hannibal questioned. "It's getting quite late. The sooner we wake her, the sooner Alana can get her home and to bed."

"Good idea." Alana stood and moved to the couch.

Will glanced at Hannibal.

"What did you tell them?" He whispered, a sneer on his lips. Hannibal waved dismissively.

"Nothing horrific. I will fill you in at a later date."

Will narrowed his eyes but quickly pulled on a thin smile as Abigail wandered over.

"You know passing out might not be the best way to tell somebody you're done shopping." She mumbled. "You need to use your words."

"Yeah, next time I will definitely be bringing a dictionary." Will smirked. "First thing on my to-do list: Use words, not gravity to get my point across."

"See, was that so hard?"

# twenty nine

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Hannibal's hurt feelings
Mention of blood

"So our first trip out was a rousing success. I'm thinking about revoking your travel privileges." Will sighed the next morning, rubbing the back of his neck and sitting down at the table. He saw Hannibal stiffen for a moment at the stove.

"I think that's a bit of an over reaction, Will. It's not my fault you had an episode."

"You put me in a grand position to trigger one though."

"I did. Yes. But I was also attempting to help you prevent one." Hannibal set a plate in front of Will, decidedly less politely than he had before. "I was trying to keep your focus on me, on what we were doing, and for the most part it worked. Abigail and Alana seemed to have simply... overwhelmed you."

Will frowned, watching Hannibal. The demon seemed upset or offended at Will's suggestion that he didn't have Will's best interest at heart. He did recall the conversation he was having with Hannibal in the grocery store; he did recall how everything else faded away into a soft obscurity while they were talking; he did remember being incredibly shocked at Abigail and Alana showing up. Was the demon genuinely concerned with his well being? Will quickly took a bite of the meal in front of him.

"This is really good." He muttered by way of an apology. He turned in time to catch Hannibal smiling at him.

"Thank you."

"I wasn't... really serious about revoking your travel privileges." Will felt the urge to clarify, glancing at Hannibal over the lens of his glasses. He saw the demon nod.

"Well that's good. I tend to get into mischief when I'm bored. However," Hannibal set a plate down for himself and happily slid into the chair. "if you'd like we can spend our time outside the house separate. There's no need for me to be tethered to you like a dog. Might make things easier on you. I can do my social errands alone, not bother you with them."

"I'd have to be at least somewhere close by, right?"

"Not necessarily."

Will frowned hard at Hannibal.

"Have you /ever/ told me the truth?"

"Will." Hannibal sighed. "I have /always/ told you the truth."

"Not the entire truth, not the whole truth."

"You haven't asked the right questions. /This/ is why summoners usually set their demons to a task and look the other way."

"So there's a way to let you out into the world without me? What does that mean? Freeing you from my bond? Putting you on a task--cause I'm not doing that."

"Nothing like that, I assure you. You summoned me so I am bound to you almost no matter what. Different circumstances mean different things, but in the end it comes down to me and you. You must break the circle to free me and you must create all circles that I may use. I could make a circle but it would be no more powerful than a child's drawing. The circle in the kitchen ensures that I can move about in this house. The small circle in your wallet ensures that I can move in an area around you. There is a way you can create another circle to let me move freely, without you."

"And why exactly would I want to do that?"

"In the off chance you need my assistance but are not close enough to gather me. You can't just snap your fingers or say a few words and magically I will arrive."

"I'd be setting you loose on the world. It'd be like a free pass to do whatever you wanted."

"In a way, but you forget that I'm not here to cause chaos and suffering and death, Will. I am here at your behest, to do your bidding. Setting me free, so to speak, does not mean you'll be loosing a wild animal into the streets of Virginia. It simply means I will have more freedom to do things for you, tasked to or not."

"Like...?"

"Well, you have been asked by your friends to make an appointment to visit a Dr.Chilton, yes? Forgive my assumption but I can only imagine such a stressful event may make driving home unsafe for you. I would happily accompany you, but would prefer not to haunt the hospital while you are seeing the doctor. This freedom would give me the ability to drop you off and then return when you are finished."

"And what would you do in the meantime?"

"Always attempting to peg me with the sinister." Hannibal sighed, rather dramatically. "I would probably go see a movie. I hear the modern cinema is breathtaking."

Will gave Hannibal a flat look. The demon merely raised an eyebrow. Hannibal sighed and almost rolled his eyes.

"I also need a haircut and I doubt you would want to join me for that. Yes, while under this freedom I would have more free reign, especially as I am not on a task, but if you don't start to trust me than this relationship cannot ever move forward."

"Don't call it a relationship."

"What should I call it, hmm? We already have the curiosity of your friends."

"It's a situation, and please don't bring them into this. It's bad enough I am continuing to humor you... I don't need them poking around."

"Humor me." Hannibal growled, looking away. Again Will had the distinct impression that he had hurt or offended the demon. He didn't enjoy the silence that signaled the end of their conversation. They finished their breakfast in the cloud of unease. Will attempted once or twice to glance at Hannibal, even wet his lips in preparation for small talk, but his stomach rebelled against the idea and Will didn't push it. Hannibal stood after they both placed their forks down and cleared the table. Will rubbed at his temples as he heard the water running in the sink.

"I'll make my appointment with Dr.Chilton and we can... try this new thing. Is that... Does that agree with you?" Will grit his teeth, watching the muscles in Hannibal's back work. The dishes were not /that/ dirty. He was either angry or attempting to pout by putting too much effort into his scrubbing.

"I see no reason why it shouldn't. A trial run, then." His voice was still rough around the edges. Will frowned.

Why did he feel bad that the demon felt bad? It was admittedly hard to think of Hannibal as a demon since he'd been parading around in a man suit since the first night. Maybe his mind was just playing tricks on him, using his eyes as leverage. Will was certain if he had to stare at the monstrous visage Hannibal had first presented him that it would be much easier to ignore the demon's 'hurt feelings'. It was just human empathy--and damnit didn't Will have that in spades--making him aware of emotions within the demon. It didn't help quell his guilt. It didn't make him want to make it up to Hannibal any less.

"How does this work, then?"

"You'll need to make another circle, a small one, on a small piece of paper would be fine." Hannibal paused. He turned slowly and Will looked up to meet his gaze. "And I will need a small vial of your blood."

# thirty

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Implications of self harm
Blood
Injury

Will frowned hard at the small kitchen table in front of him. While he had been too drunk to properly record and catalogue his feelings during Hannibal's summoning, he could bet it didn't feel nearly as sinister as he felt right now. He sat with his sleeves rolled up in a pair of old pants, leaning forward onto his knees. On the table next to him sat a small hunting knife, a yet-uncapped glass vial, a piece of paper ripped from a notebook, and an incredibly old pencil he couldn't believe Hannibal had found. In front of him, kneeling on the floor like he was about to start cleaning it, was Hannibal. The demon was impeccably dressed--like they were going somewhere fancy after all the Satanic stuff was done--with his coral colored shirt sleeves rolled up.

"Just how messy is this going to be?" Will asked, mouth dry.

"As messy as you make it, Will." Hannibal chuckled at him. "I just need you to fill that vial, no more, no less. You don't need to go gouging your arm to pieces, but it will need to be more than a prick of your finger." Hannibal dropped his eyes to Will's arm and then glanced up at him cautiously. "I don't imagine making yourself bleed is an impossible task." Maroon eyes darted over numerous scars once more. Hannibal tried to remain fairly passive as Will sat up, rubbing his forearm as if to rub the scars away.

"Not making me feel any better about this."

"I apologize. If it's too much to ask, I could re-open the wound at your shoulder? Your wrist from the other night? It would take very little to convince either injury to bleed again."

Will frowned, pinching the fabric of his shirt between his fingers. He turned his head and looked at his left shoulder, as if trying to seek permission from his own flesh. It would be better to have that injury returned, have it heal naturally to avoid raising suspicion. Something which hadn't occurred to Will until then. He turned to look back at Hannibal, slightly put off to find the demon staring at him, waiting for eye contact.

"My shoulder. I--don't want anyone to suspect anything so, we'll re-open that and let it heal naturally. It wouldn't be good to have Jack asking questions." Will reached over and grabbed the paper and pencil.

"No it would not. That's a smart decision." Hannibal watched, smiling, as Will scribbled the circle expertly onto the paper without realizing that he'd done so without a reference. It was perfect.

Will paused, noting that Hannibal did not make a move. The demon was eagerly awaiting permission. Will shifted and began unbuttoning his shirt under Hannibal's watchful eyes. The demon remained posed on his knees, hands on his thighs like a servant waiting for orders. Will glanced away as if he were looking at something indecent. He shrugged out of his shirt and tossed it onto the table. He turned back to Hannibal and nodded.

Hannibal reached out and grabbed the vial from the table. He moved into a crouch rather than a kneel and put himself closer to Will than he had been yet. He felt and saw the other man's breath hitch slightly as Will leaned away from him, arching his back just slightly. It was a rather beautiful thing to watch, Hannibal mused to himself, his eyes drifting over the curve of Will's body. He shifted forward ever-so-slightly again and pressed his left knee against both of Will's, tucked tightly against each other. Hannibal reached out and put a hand over Will's shoulder, palm where the injury should be. He felt the man flinch and look away.

"This is going to hurt." Hannibal warned quietly.

"I know." Will sighed, turning his head to find Hannibal's face very close. His eyes darted from Hannibal's eyes to his lips and then quickly away. He nodded shakily. "Do it."

Hannibal nodded back and tightened his fingers into Will's flesh. He heard Will hiss through clenched teeth, watched the muscles in his jaw tense all the way down through his neck. Under his palm Hannibal felt the flesh breaking, tearing at his command. He heard Will's free hand smack into the bottom of the chair, gripping tightly. Will's left hand reached up and firmly clamped itself around Hannibal's forearm. The demon glanced at it briefly. He gently slid his hand away to study the injury he'd re-created. He nodded to himself.

"I'll need to aggravate this, Will. Make it bleed."

"Stop talking and do what you need to do before I hit you and change my mind." Will tilted his head just slightly to make eye contact. Hannibal nodded, not breaking the look as he pressed his thumb to the wound... hard. "Hnnng!" Will's head tilted back and he quickly looked away, squeezing his eyes shut and trying not to pull completely out of Hannibal's reach. His hand gripped tighter around Hannibal's forearm and the demon smiled.

Hannibal slowly brought the vial up to gather the trickles of blood now running down Will's arm. He watched strained breathing slowly calm, Will's chest hitching every now and again, muscles slowly relaxing. Hannibal set the vial aside and Will released his arm at last. He capped the vial and then turned to look at Will. The man looked rather torn apart. He had relaxed rather suddenly, his knees breaking contact so that his legs parted just slightly, his right arm was carefully resting on his leg and his left arm hung at his side. His head was still tilted back, giving Hannibal a delicious view of Will's throat. The demon's eyes slowly moved towards the stream of blood on Will's arm.

"Hmm," Hannibal hummed thoughtfully. He heard Will start to speak--likely something of a complaint about having to clean up--but he didn't wait to hear the rest. He leaned in and felt

Will turn to watch him. Hannibal parted his lips, leaned forward and pressed his tongue to the left side of Will's chest. He drew a long lick up towards the wound in his shoulder, blood clinging to his tongue and leaving Will's flesh clean. Hannibal slowly pulled away to find Will staring at him. It was not the type of stare Hannibal was expecting. There was very little disgust and far too much curiosity. Hannibal lifted a barely perceptible eyebrow and leaned back in. Will did not attempt to turn his head as Hannibal's directive clearly shifted from his shoulder to his mouth. Will's eyes darted from Hannibal's lips to his eyes and back, blurring everything into a steam of color. He felt Hannibal's breath over his cheeks, felt their noses brush. Will let his eyes flutter closed...

His phone rang noisily in the other room. Will was instantly on his feet, feeling himself pushing Hannibal back with the sudden motion. He darted into the other room and picked up his phone. He didn't bother checking the caller ID before flipping it open.

"Hello?" He said, far too quickly, far too eagerly. "Jack?" He knitted his eyebrows together. As Jack spoke on the other line Will slowly turned. In the kitchen Hannibal had capped the vial and was in the process of wrapping the scribbled circle around the vial, securing it with tape. Will swallowed hard as Hannibal met his eyes briefly through the doorway. The demon did not appear upset, put out or at all ruffled by what had just transpired.

"I--I'm sorry Jack, reception out here is terrible. Repeat that for me?"

# thirty one

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Implications of masturbation
Hannibal in leather
Hannibal treating a motorcycle like a lover
Hannibal on a motorcycle

Hannibal watched quietly as Will proceeded to get dressed. The man offered him no words and so Hannibal didn't push the issue. It would actually work better this way, the tension and the unspoken thing. Hannibal turned to hide a small grin as he cleaned up from their recent experiment. He heard Will's shoes hit the kitchen tile and he turned, the small vial in his hand. He lifted his eyebrows as Will tried to look at him, then dropped his eyes.

"Jack called. They've had some kind of development and he wants me there." Will said flatly. He paused again and Hannibal could almost hear him struggling to meet eyes. Instead the special agent lifted his hand and pointed to the vial. "Trial run. I-I trust you."

Hannibal felt a small thrill at the short burst of eye contact. Will searched his eyes for some hint of betrayal, but Hannibal kept his expression pleasant. After a second Will nodded and turned in the doorway, pausing once more to glance over his shoulder.

"There's a... Harley in the shed. Hasn't been used in a while but it should still run. Keys are uh--top drawer on my nightstand."

"Thank you, Will."

Will nodded and hesitated for a second longer before fairly dashing out the door. Hannibal stood in the kitchen, running his fingers over the label on the vial as he heard the car engine roar, and the sound of tires on gravel. It was not an altogether unpleasant sound, that. He opened the front door and set Will's hounds loose on the yard. Hannibal slipped the vial into his pocket like a precious thing and moved to open the top drawer of Will's nightstand. His eyebrows lifted and he couldn't hold in a surprised 'oh'.

Most apparent was a box of condoms. They were quite expired and the box was quite dusty, but the fact remained that they were obviously there. Hannibal chuckled out loud to himself, pulling the drawer further open to reveal a small bottle of lotion and box of tissues. He was highly, highly amused, laughing to himself. He shook his head as he wondered why Will hadn't grabbed the keys for him--either he wanted Hannibal to stumble upon his 'Will time' drawer, or he had completely forgotten what else was in there--either way it was one of the

funniest things Hannibal had seen in quite some time. He set the boxes and the lotion on top of the night stand, unable to really see much underneath them. He tilted his head curiously at a stack of pictures, turned conspicuously upside down. He paused before taking them out over matters of privacy, but Will /had/ suggested Hannibal go retrieve the keys himself. Forgetfulness or not that was as good as permission.

Hannibal pulled the pictures out and flipped them over, licking his tongue over his bottom lip as he sat down on Will's bed. He knitted his brows together. The first picture was of Will, Jack and another man. They were laughing, standing around a table in what appeared to be an office. Hannibal was fairly certain that Will harbored no latent sexual feelings for Jack, and so the object of interest in this picture had to be the other man. Hannibal slid this picture to the bottom of the stack and was rewarded with--almost--a confirmation. The next picture was the unidentified man from the first standing with a very young Abigail. She was easy enough to pick out--same hair, same eyes--even though she was quite a small thing. The man stood proudly behind her as she held up a pheasant by the feet. Hunting trophy. Hannibal hummed to himself and discarded this picture as well.

A candid photo. Hannibal studied the picture with a pleased little smirk. The picture was from inside a hotel room, angled to catch the reflection in the bathroom mirror where the door was just slightly ajar. In the room two beds and two sets of bullet proof vests could be seen. In the mirror of the bathroom stood the man in the other pictures, towel low around his waist, dripping and in a moment of quiet reflection. He had no idea the picture was being taken, and considering Will was in possession of it Hannibal could only assume Will had been the photographer.

"Naughty, Mr.Graham." Hannibal said with a tsk, setting this picture aside as well.

The final photograph was Will and this unidentified man sleeping propped up, shoulder to shoulder, on the floor of an ambulance. They both wore FBI gear and were neatly splattered with blood to suggest something had recently gone down. Neither of them looked to be very injured, though they were both obviously beyond exhausted. In the background Hannibal could barely make out Jack Crawford yelling at a police officer.

Hannibal hmmed curiously and set the pictures back in the drawer. The keys were quite easy to find after that. Hannibal--chuckling again--put the objects back where he had found them. He opened the front door and made a show of pouring kibble into the dogs' bowls. They immediately ran into the house like starving wild creatures. Hannibal closed the door behind them. He retreated upstairs--unable to hold back a final laugh as he passed the nightstand--and shifted through his various jackets until he found one that he deemed suitable.

Slipping the leather jacket on over his vest and shirt, Hannibal stepped out the back door and made his way to the shed. He hadn't taken the time to explore the shed, didn't figure he would want to really, but now he was jovial and curious. The shed was quite large, and Hannibal let his eyes wander over the various boat motors and pieces scattered about. There were a number of well used, filthy tool benches and discarded, oil stained towels everywhere. A large freezer lay on it's side towards the back of the shed, and the Harley sat close by, covered in a blue/green tarp.

It was a lovely machine, quite neglected, but lovely all the same. Hannibal threw the tarp back completely and tilted his head to look her over. He reached out and ran his hand along the seat, fingertips just barely caressing the leather, rising over the seams. He knelt and stroked along her framework, her chassis, then stood and tugged the helmet from the handle bars. He tipped it over and smacked it a few times, noting with a look of disdain the leaves and pinetags which drifted to the floor. He flipped it towards himself and reached it to remove the rest of the debris, then turned it over and gave it another few good whacks.

He gently led the bike through the maze of a shed, and replaced her kick stand in the gravel. He gave her one final check over in the sunlight before gently slipping the key in the ignition and giving it a turn, brushing his knuckle tenderly around tarnished metal as he did. It seemed as if she was finished, but Hannibal's persistence paid off and she soon purred into life. The vibrations ran up the demons arm and settled in his chest. His grin widened. He whacked the helmet a few more times and then carefully secured it, lowered the visor, and climbed atop the roaring mechanical creature.

He'd never ridden one before, not that it mattered, not that it appeared that way. He tore down the gravel driveway with the confidence of a man who'd ridden since his childhood. Pouring onto the main road like tar he took off down the right with alarming clarity. He did not need GPS or maps or anything of the sort. He could feel his destination like a ping in the back of his head, pulling him forward with all the trappings of a summoning circle, though he knew this circle had long been broken.

What serendipity, he mused, that she would be so close. He wondered what it was about Virginia, about this area, which seemed to attract such unique individuals. He would never have thought to find her in the states. She had always seemed to him a woman of finer tastes, a woman for France and Italy and Spain. What she could possibly find to appease her in Virginia, he did not know. Though perhaps he would ask, perhaps that would be the first thing he would ask. He could almost see her sharp little face curving into horror as he walked up an imagined flight of stairs to her door. He could see her eyes widen in fear as he smiled at her, helmet under his arm.

'Did you think you would never see me again?' He would ask, his voice like honey. She would not be able to respond. She would be dumbfounded and breathless. He would step into her home as if an invited guest and she would quietly close the door and follow him.

Hannibal slowly pulled the bike into a gap between two cars, at the edge of a sidewalk, looking up at a beautiful home. He had ridden the better part of three hours to find her, his internal map was good but things had changed since he was last here. He removed the keys from the ignition and set the helmet under his arm. He walked up the path to her home, grinning. His lips pulled back to reveal his teeth as he could see the doorknob turn.

"I wasn't expecting any other clients today I..." Her voice was just as he remembered it. Just as calm, and collected as when she had summoned him over three hundred years ago. As soft as the day she made her bargain, and as hushed as the moment she broke his circle.

"What's the matter, Bedelia? Did you think you would never see me again?"

# thirty two

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Vomiting

Will pressed his forehead so completely into his steering wheel that he figured it would break, or his skull would break, and either outcome would be preferable to the migraine he could feel building behind his eyes. Driving to meet Jack had been a nightmare of flashing lights and thrums of pain through his spine. He'd pulled on an old pair of sunglasses but that only helped so much. He was at the stage now where there was nothing he could do to stop the pain aside from hope he was near to a convenient place to vomit.

He had almost kissed Hannibal. He had almost let the demon kiss him.

Will let out a shout as there was suddenly a hand on his window. Gasping to regain composure he rolled it down and narrowed his eyes.

"Ms. Lounds."

"Will Graham. I should have expected you. Jack likes to have all his friends around to share in the glee of keeping the rest of us in the dark." Freddie stepped back just enough to let Will out of his car. Will did not have the patience for her. For her sake he hoped someone came out to fetch him before he did something stupid.

"I'm here helping the FBI, Freddie." Will growled, clenching his teeth.

"Are you? Because the last time you said that to me, my husband and fifteen girls from our church were ritualistically slaughtered. Slaughtered! To pave the way for Satan to come into this world!"

"They weren't summoning Satan."

"And how do you know? You seem like you have a lot of inside information on this. Are you a part of this? Is this all part of some government plan to eradicate Christians? Christ can see, Will. He can see right through you, he knows what's inside you."

Will had a terrible thought. He knew it was a bad idea but he entertained it for far too long and by the time he'd made up his mind not to go through with it, he had no other options. Feeling his mouth suddenly very wet, his stomach lurching, he stopped. He could practically feel Freddie Lounds just inches behind him. He turned to face her and managed one strained

smile before retching. He caught her shoes and the front of her skirt with the remnants of Hannibal's breakfast. She let out a shriek and stared up at Will in abject horror.

"Now you see what's inside me too, Ms.Lounds. I think it was lamb." Will almost felt himself smiling as he walked by a speechless Jimmy and Brian on their way into HQ. The cold air inside felt better on his head than the screaming of that obnoxious woman. He made a bee-line for the nearest water fountain.

"Will that was awesome! Jack's gonna have your head, but that was awesome." Brian congratulated, slapping Will on the shoulder. Will recoiled with a groan and frowned.

"Don't... do that again or I'm liable to make a repeat performance."

"Oh, you not feeling good? Does Jack know?"

"Not like he'd care." Jimmy grumbled.

"It's a--just a migraine. It happens when you're not familiar with your own head." Will ignored the strange, almost worried looks passed between the men as he made it to Jack's office. Jack was on the phone, his face split with a grin. He waved Will in enthusiastically. Will held open the door for Jimmy, Brian and the half-asleep Beverly. He and Jimmy let Brian and Beverly sit--as was the habit--while Jimmy stood behind Brian, Will tucked himself against the wall. Brian leaned forward and began whispering in a hushed tone to Beverly.

"Ye-yes, thank you again. Yes. Thank-yes. Ok. Goodbye." Jack rolled his eyes slightly and ended his conversation. He looked back up to see Beverly and Brian looking at each other in a strange kind of awe. He lifted an eyebrow. "What happened?"

"Will," Beverly jerked a thumb as an indicator as if Jack was unaware where Will was, "threw up on Freddie Lounds."

"It was beautiful." Jimmy praised.

Will sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, sliding his glasses up on his forehead to do so. Jack couldn't say he wasn't pleased--and impressed--but he tried not let too much of that show.

"I'll be expecting a call from her soon then, I imagine?"

"Yeah, that's likely. She'll probably claim it was assault." Will admitted. Jack waved at the air.

"It doesn't matter, I'm too high to let a possible lawsuit from Freddie Lounds bring me down."

"Well don't keep us in suspense." Jimmy leaned onto his hands on the back of Brian's chair. Beverly shared a smirk with Jack.

"We got one kid from the basement circle." Jack held up a finger. "We got a witness to the burning at the community center." He added another. "We got IDs on the girl in the basement, and the woman in the cornfield." His grin widened. "And as of three hours ago, we got four

names involved in both circles, an ID on all three victims of the community center, and another young kid in custody."

Jack enjoyed the happy faces in his office. It wasn't very often he got to be the barer of good news.

"Our gutted woman in the community sister is Anna Shore, younger sister to Miranda Shore from the cornfield. One of the men is John Andrew, who doesn't seem to be tied in to any of this, and the other man is James Totting--the man Aaron told us was responsible for bringing the sacrifice, so to speak, to the basement."

"So these aren't just random people trying to buy into this whole Satanic cult thing... They're connected."

"It's really starting to seem that way."

"That's--that's good. That's great!" Brian barked like an excited dog. Will winced in the background. "This should be so much easier to wrap up than chasing a whole bunch of non related incidents!"

"Hasn't really been easy so far." Beverly attempted to ground him.

"Did you just hear the man, Katz? We just made a huge breakthrough. Don't be such a Debbie Downer." Jimmy pouted.

"Who do we have in custody?" Will said weakly from the back, head tilted to rest on the wall, throat exposed and eyes squeezed shut.

"Cody Boulware, kid who hosted the basement party. He went on the run--go figure--after the whole thing and a few good friends of ours in Florida picked him up two nights ago. He was trying to hot wire a car. They were planning on just locking him up for the evening until they got a hit on his ID. Called us shortly after and escorted him up."

"Has the little rat said anything?" Jimmy growled eagerly.

"Not really anything helpful, he's way more belligerent than Aaron though. He spent the whole ride up yelling and cursing at the officers, and hasn't had much but cursing to say since we got him. He did say that none of this would matter if the summoning had worked."

Will's eyes flashed open, and his shock was enough to temporarily halt the onslaught of pain. He slowly lowered his head to look across the room at Jack. A black cloud was growing behind the intimidating man.

"He said they were all promised power and glory, a demon to grant them anything they wished for."

Will felt sweat beading down his neck as the blackness took form, a torso rising well into the air.

"He said it was Totting's fault, he brought the wrong sacrifice."

Six arms posed in the air; a pair on Jack's shoulders, a pair around his head like a halo and a pair cupped above that as if in supplication of a higher power.

"Nothing about the Great Red Dragon, or whatever, but it's definitely more confirmation that we're looking at a series of connected murders. We need to find out who the ring leader is and we need to do it quick." Jack turned to look at Will. He frowned and moved to stand. As the three other agents turned Will made a dash for the small trashcan by the door. Jimmy made a face and turned around, covering his ears as Will attempted to recreate his assault on Freddie Lounds.

"Will?" Jack asked as the dark haired man seemed to calm down, one hand braced on the wall.

Will shook his head. He stood shakily and pulled off his glasses, breathing deep and wincing as the pain returned. He shook his head again and left Jack's office. He couldn't hear if anyone called after him, his head was hissing and buzzing with the sound of the overhead lights. He stumbled his way down a hallway he knew too well until he pushed into the bathroom door. Shuffling his feet as if they were too heavy to properly pick up, he fell to his knees in a stall. His body tried once more to void his stomach, only to find nothing else to give. It didn't stop the retching, it didn't stop the pain. Will braced himself on the rim of the toilet and tried to gather his thoughts.

He turned his head and rested his cheek on his forearm, letting his eyes open slightly and drift out of focus. He saw hooves from under the stall door, carefully walking across the tile towards him. He heard the huffing of the stag, the sharp clawing sound of antler points on the stall. He closed his eyes and intended to keep them closed--forever if that's what it took.

"Will?" Brian called softly, stepping into the bathroom. He frowned as he saw Will's knees and approached slowly. He lowered his voice to a whisper. "They sent me in to check on you. Jimmy can't stand the sound of vomiting, Beverly refuses to come into the men's room, and Jack got called downstairs." He paused and leaned against the wall. "You sure it's just a migraine?"

"Yeah." Will groaned. "I'm--I'm used to them by now."

"Jack's worried."

"Jack's always worried."

"He told me to ask if you'd scheduled your appointment with Dr.Chilton yet?" Brian tread carefully, frowning as Will stood. He chewed on his bottom lip as Will stepped out of the stall. His face was flushed, he was nearly drenched in sweat. He looked like hell.

"He told you to--" Will paused as Brian held up a hand.

"Don't sweat it. You killed a guy, it's only fair that you go talk to the fraud. First time I pulled the trigger I had nightmares for weeks. Dr.Chilton didn't help, but he helped." Brian made a face and then tried to clarify. "He didn't help with what he said or did, he helped because

talking to him was so unbearably frustrating that I worked through all my issues and replaced it with a burning dislike of the guy."

Will managed a wry smile.

"I'm even more eager to see him now."

"I'm sure you'll get a kick out of him. You're smart, smarter than me at least, I'm sure his fumbled attempts at anything resembling therapy are gonna hit you, whack, right in the funny bone." Brian smiled, watching Will relax slightly. "Do you want me to drive you home, man? You can't drive like this."

Will frowned and shook his head.

"No I'll--I'll just go find somewhere to lie down, someplace dark and quiet."

"I've got a mini-van in the parking garage. Not stylish but great for a steak out and a nap." Brian reached into his back pocket as Will slowly began to nod, muttering a soft thank you under his breath. "No problem. I'm probably gonna be here overnight shadowing Jimmy, so--take as long as you need."

Will nodded, grimacing as he took Brian's keys. He leaned against the stall door as Brian nodded and headed out of the bathroom. A nap in a mini van actually sounded rather nice. The parking garage was cold, it was an odd time of day for anyone to be coming or going so outside noise should be minimal. Hannibal was likely testing the bounds of his newfound freedom so he didn't have anything to rush home to. He--

"Oh god..."

He'd told Hannibal to open the top drawer on his nightstand.

# thirty three

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Self harm
Pain as a coping mechanism
Pain as a grounding tool
Abuse of medication
Anxiety
Descriptions of an anxiety attack
Unstable Will

(And as a brief note that shouldn't ruin the chapter, he is NOT attempting to overdose, which is why I have not tagged this for suicide attempt.)

Will's comforting sound of tires on gravel was broken and interrupted by a sound he hadn't heard in years--the piano. For whatever reason he had kept the old thing after his parents died but he didn't know how to play and didn't have the drive to learn. It appeared, however, that Hannibal could play. Once again Will found himself and his life rather interrupted by the strange sort of beauty about the demon he summoned. He stepped out of his car and squeezed the keys in his hand into a tight fist, feeling them pinch at the palm of his hand. His body was exhausted as if it had been fighting a war all day, as was usually the case after such a migraine. He filled the emptiness in himself with anger as he moved up the stairs and opened his unlocked front door.

The piano was louder. It seemed like it should have been a sad piece, but Hannibal's fingers flew over the keys, almost as if he were forcing a happier sound. Will didn't recognize the music.

"Good evening, Will." Hannibal said without turning around. His hair had been cut, rather short, and was parted perfectly. It now looked much more put together and certainly complimented his 'classy' tastes. Will hated it. He scrunched up his nose. "I trust your day went well?"

"Why did mine work." Will said, the cadence of his voice not lending aid to the question. His voice was flat.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about." Hannibal's shoulders moved with his hands as they continued to beat a song from the old piano.

"None of the other circles worked. They're all the same. Aaron said he heard someone, but no one came through. /You/ didn't come through. Why did mine work?"

"Dumb luck."

"Bullshit."

Hannibal plucked a few more keys triumphantly, then laid his hands in his lap. He reached up and closed the instrument then turned to face Will on the bench. He tilted his head curiously to one side.

"You look ill."

"Answer my question."

"I'll repeat: Dumb luck." Hannibal held up a hand as Will moved to protest. "The circle is a bond, it's meant to leash together the demon and the summoner--the summoner who's blood is to be spilled in the circle. A demon cannot enter this plane through a circle without a summoner. When you spill enough blood to kill the summoner, you can't really bring up a demon, can you?"

"I didn't know that."

"And so, dumb luck." Hannibal stood. He and Will found themselves standing opposite each other. Behind Hannibal was the bright light of the kitchen, white and pure. Behind Will was the dark shadow of the front door, closed and sealed. Buster and Winston watched curiously from the fireplace.

"Where did you go today."

"Isn't it obvious?"

"Don't do that. Don't dodge my questions. Where. Did. You. Go?"

"I went to see an old friend." Hannibal's voice was thick and strained. Will watched the demon's face tighten slightly in discomfort.

"Who?"

"An old summoner."

Will paused. For some reason the statement struck him like a betrayal and he didn't like it. He didn't like not being in control of what things made him feel. He had no control over any other part of his life, he wasn't about to let some other worldly creature take emotional stability away from him. He thrust out his hand and looked at Hannibal. The demon glanced to his palm and then to Will, feigning confusion.

"Give me the vial." Will growled. He watched Hannibal's face turn from slightly surprised to dark. He watched the demon stiffly reach into his pants pocket and pull out the vial. Hannibal seemed to hold it for a moment before he was compelled to hand it over. He dropped it into

Will's hand. Will, in turn, threw it at the floor unceremoniously. He watched a slight twitch of the demon's eyelids as the vial hit the ground and shattered. Neither of them broke eye contact. Will felt heat pouring off Hannibal, but it was blowing backwards from the wind he felt whipping at his back. Though Hannibal did not move a muscle Will saw within him a dog surging, mouth foaming, at the end of his leash.

Will turned quickly away and retreated upstairs. He threw his jacket and keys to the ground outside the bedroom, as if their impact on the floor would be a slap across Hannibal's face. He stepped into the bathroom and quickly littered the floor with the rest of his clothing, stiff from time-dried sweat. He didn't even bother to properly adjust the water before stepping in and closing himself off. He stood under the shower head and covered his face with his hands. Reality swam behind his eyes like looking up at someone from underwater. He could see the vague outlines and recognize them as human but faces were blurred, details were blurred, important information was no longer accessible.

The tears were a surprise. Will did not consider himself emotional--though his peculiar mental states did often lead to fits of tears--but he could usually pin point the source behind tears. This left him at a loss. He tried to reason them away with words like stress and over-worked and disappointed but the words just seemed like letters lobbed at a hangman. None of them stuck.

Will pulled one hand away from his face and braced himself on the shower wall. He squeezed his forefinger and thumb against his temples even though there was no ache there to soothe. At his back he could feel the stag press it's head against his flesh, forehead between his shoulder blades. The antlers curved an flowed over his shoulders, interlocking in front of his face like a cage. The beast pushed, urged, huffed a breath against his back that sent shivers up his spine. Will found himself longing for the snake and the stag pushed harder.

Will pulled his head out of the water and grabbed the bar of soap resting near by. He worked it into a lather apathetically in his palms before smearing it around with the same amount of lackluster. He didn't feel dirty but at the same time he didn't feel like soap would wash away the filth. He let out a small hiss and turned his head as he brushed the soap over his left bicep. The wound looked angry. Will shifted the bar of soap into his left hand and reached out to press his thumb against the slice. It didn't take much prodding to make it bleed again, though the blood was barely any. It seemed tired and worn thin like the rest of him. The water quickly diluted it until it ran clean down his arm. Will sneered, betrayed somehow by his own body, and roughly scrubbed the area with the bar of soap.

The pain felt better than the emptiness. The pain was certainly better than the unstable ground he felt himself standing on. The pain was real and he could count on that, at the very least. Even when everything else could be questioned, the pain was real.

Washing his hair with the same bar of soap, Will finished up and stepped out of the water. He half expected to find his dogs--or Hannibal--standing in the bathroom waiting for him but it was empty. His soul growled like a hungry stomach at how strange that emptiness felt. He never stepped out of the shower to company. His dogs hated the humid air and he'd never showered with a lover. The emptiness felt foreign to a man who'd never left where he started.

As Will dried himself off he made sure to squeeze his left arm hard through the towel--it came away blood free.

His steps back downstairs were decidedly more gentle, more quiet than his march up. The dim light in his 'bedroom' had been turned off. From the kitchen Will could see the form of Hannibal, lying on the couch and already asleep. He snorted as he glanced down to find Buster and Winston curled up on the floor close to him. Another stab of betrayal made Will feel like he was falling backwards with nothing to grab on to. His stomach lurched for the fall that never came, like that second when a chair is tipped back right before it falls.

He poured himself a glass of water. He took a few more pain pills than he knew he should have. He threw back his covers and put himself to bed in a fit of rage.

# thirty four

Hannibal was surprised when he woke up to find Will and his dogs gone. Usually the man slept clear through to noon--that is if he had managed to fall asleep at all the previous night--and Hannibal was used to being the first one awake. Either Will had not slept or he had gotten up quite some time before sunrise to evade Hannibal. Either scenario was likely, and the demon didn't care one way or the other.

He rose and carefully made up his sleeping area. He took a quick shower--using things he had purchased for himself the previous day, one bar of soap for all cleansing, what a horrible thought--and dressed. Returning to the kitchen he began to cook breakfast. He let his mind wander as his muscle memory took over.

Will was starting to catch on too quick. He was starting to see real realization and not just 'dumb luck'. Will was figuring things out and it could only mean bad news for Hannibal. The way things were going Will would either be breaking the circle any day now, or he'd learn how to really play summoner. Hannibal shuddered at the thought. Bedelia had been the only adept summoner he'd ever known, and being so completely under another's control was not high on his list of things to do. Will had already named him--which left Hannibal completely unable to establish himself outside of Will's history--and forbid him from lying. He could still side step the truth, but he was bound now to tell Will honest things. He cursed under his breath. He would have to be careful.

He tilted his head slightly as he heard the front door creak open. Padding of pawed feet moved into the kitchen where both dogs happily barked at Hannibal. The demon kept his ear trained on Will, ambling about in the other room. He preoccupied himself with breakfast as he heard the steps move closer--horrible rubber sounding steps--Will had gone fishing. Hannibal kept himself quiet and busy at the stove as he listened to Will sit, remove his boots and fidget. After a second of thick silence Hannibal's ears picked up on the slight tap of something being set on the kitchen table. Unable to swallow his curiosity he glanced over his shoulder.

Will slowly pulled his hand away from the brand new vial. He folded his hands in his lap, watching Hannibal process what he was seeing. Will kept the eye contact as the demon looked at him for an explanation.

"Mood swings are par for the course when I'm not medicated." He said as way of an apology, over-annunciating his words. He reached back over and picked up the vial. He rolled it in his hands, well aware Hannibal was watching him intently.

"I don't..." Will paused, scrunching up his face as if he were confused and at a loss for words, "I'm not giving this to you. I will, but--not without restraint. It's going to stay with me until you--deserve it, or--"

"Ask nicely?" Hannibal offered, returning to cooking.

"Yes."

"Hmm. If that's the case, may I ask what prompted this change in rules? You were going to trust me, you said, did I overstep my bounds yesterday?"

"I shouldn't have trusted you yesterday." Will answered honestly. He watched the muscles roll in Hannibal's shoulders as he worked.

"Trusted me to be out or trusted me to know more of you than you wanted me to?" Hannibal felt Will suck all the air out of the kitchen. He hid an amused smirk to himself against the steam of the stove. The man might have been night and day from Hannibal's other summoners, but there were some things that were easy to read on a human's face.

"Who was he?"

"That's none of your business."

"We can play this game, Will, like we've been trying to play it, or you can just answer me. I've seen the pictures. I already know. I'm trying to give you more control of the situation."

"If you already know then how is my telling you taking back control?"

"I don't know his name. I don't know /who/ he was. I only know his picture and his identity." Hannibal politely set a plate down in front of Will, watching as the man placed the vial next to the salt and pepper shakers.

Will mulled his answer over like the egg in his mouth. He watched Hannibal sit, politely open to any answer Will would give, thought not waiting impatiently.

"Abigail's father." Will answered after a second. "An agent who used to work with Jack and I."

"Were you partners?"

"In a sense. He was really good at picking up on my weird, out-of-place cues. We made a good team. Jack saw that. We weren't officially anything other than law enforcement, did plenty apart from one another."

"And, romantically?"

Will glared up at Hannibal. The demon lifted his fingers off his fork slightly by way of appeasement. He'd overstepped and was obediently backing away. He watched Will return to breakfast with words on the tip of his tongue. Hannibal wanted to hear them, but Will was very much like a startled deer and too much noise would easily frighten him away.

"How did he die?" Hannibal tried to keep his face soft as Will looked up at him.

"Jack shot him." Will set down his fork and sighed heavily. He leaned back in his chair. "He--didn't have a choice. Hobbs got caught up in something. He was already dead when Jack shot him, his body just hadn't let him know it yet."

Hannibal nodded, as if he understood everything. He did not press further and Will provided no extra information. As Hannibal gathered their dishes Will reached up and grabbed his forearm gently.

"I--want you to come with me to see Jack. We're getting a lot of information from these kids and I want you there. As a consultant."

"And what will you be telling Jack to grant me such permission?"

"You're an occult specialist. A professor. Doesn't conflict with anything you told Abigail and Alana, does it?"

"No." Hannibal said, standing as Will released his arm.

"Good." Will stood and started up stairs to change. "You're driving. I left my head in the stream."

Hannibal turned to watch Will walk upstairs. He glanced at the vial on the table. He could easily take it, replace it with a fake. He was bound mostly by mortal laws in this body--mostly--but that would be easily within his power. He felt his palms itch, he took a step towards the table and paused. Glancing up the stairs he sighed and returned to the dishes. His freedom sang behind him like the call of a harpy.

# thirty five

Chapter Notes

HEADS UP

The next few days--and a few days next week--are going to be very busy for me. I've been updating like mad, writing like the possessed, but it will slow down for these few days. I intend to keep the pace up when I'm not busy, but I didn't want any of you to get worried. I am still deeply entrenched in the black hole that is Hannibal, and as my husband and I have watched all three seasons almost 4 times now, there is no going back.

Thanks for your patience, the kudos and comments, and I hope you continue to enjoy your trip to hell!

Will fell asleep in the car with Hannibal at the wheel. Whenever possible he preferred to have someone else drive--for a number of reasons--and he usually fell asleep. He was sure it was due to his insomnia; something about being a passenger let him relax enough to fall asleep. Alana insisted it was because of a lack of stability he'd gotten as an infant; something about how Will could always trust the car to be a safe place. Will didn't like being compared to a child in any sense, and so he ignored Alana's analyzing. Until he predictably fell asleep in another car, then he woke with her words on his tongue. Hannibal woke him gently once they'd arrived, and Will nodded with a small thanks under his breath.

They stepped out of the car and Will rubbed at the back of his neck.

"I'd fill you in on things but I don't talk to anyone about anything, really, so it'd be perfectly normal for an old friend to know nothing about my professional life."

"Fair enough." Hannibal offered a smile.

"Don't bring up Hobbs." Will commanded, not to be misunderstood. "At all, in any way. In fact, act like you can't say his name."

Hannibal nodded, and Will watched him lick his tongue out over his bottom lip. Something clicked in the back of Will's mind. Hannibal's eyes were firmly trained on the building in front of them.

"You're not going to answer any questions about our history together." Will continued, keeping his voice firm. "Make up shit about yourself, I don't care, but when it comes to you and me, you will let me do all of the talking." The click in the back of his mind started a whirring of machines as Hannibal nodded stiffly, eyes still locked on the building.

He was /commanding/ Hannibal. He was giving orders and Hannibal had to obey them, set on a task or not. Will started forward and felt Hannibal fall into step just slightly behind him. He tried not to smile at the surge of power he felt in that moment. Though it was next to impossible as power rarely presented itself to Will.

Hannibal felt torn in two. A large half of him wanted to rip Will to pieces, scatter his flesh over miles of land, eat what was left and spear his head on a stake. The other half of him in a quiet voice suggested that perhaps kneeling in obedience to Will Graham would be a wholly different experience than bowing to the will of Bedelia. He warred quietly with himself as Will led him into the building and down a hall to knock politely on office doors.

"Will," Jack said with a soft amount of surprise, "I wasn't expecting you so early."

"Didn't sleep." Will provided, holding open the door and waving in Hannibal. Jack gave him a confused look and then stood. He offered his hand as Hannibal moved to sit.

"Hannibal Lecter." The demon provided, a strong handshake exchanged before he took his seat.

"This is the specialist I was telling you about Jack." Will said quietly.

"Oh, yes. I was wondering when Will would finally convince you to stop by." Jack smiled, genuine. Hannibal lifted his eyebrows.

"Hannibal can be stubborn, especially since he knows he's not any kind of officer." Will provided, almost able to feel Hannibal staring him down. "Took me the better part of a week to finally convince him it was ok."

Hannibal sucked in a quiet breath. Will had told Jack about him over a week ago? Will had this planned?

"Well, I'm glad he finally broke you down!" Jack chuckled, Hannibal returned the laugh sincerely enough. "We could really use all the help we can get. How much has Will told you?" Jack looked from one man to the other.

"A good bit. I left out some specific details since I wasn't sure what you'd be comfortable with, but he knows enough to get started." Will leaned into the chair casually. He could not recall the last time he'd felt so at ease in Jack's office.

"Good, good. That'll cut down on our drag time. The deal is, professor, we thought we were just dealing with a bunch of people caught up in this whole Red Dragon business. It was unnerving that so many people gave in to such a lunatic, but it was easy to comprehend, easy to explain. Unfortunately new evidence and testimony has washed all that away. These murders are connected, directly. The same people keep popping up and even some of the victims have been related. We've heard no talk of the Red Dragon among them, but they're all saying the same thing: they wanted to summon a demon and it didn't work. None of them will say why--aside from the obvious, power gains, etc--and none of them will explain what's being done in these circles aside from, again, the obvious. We could really use someone with your knowledge and expertise to look over crime scene photos, maybe even talk to these kids

and see if you can't wrangle out more details. Anything that might tell us what we can expect, or how we can move on from here."

"Of course." Hannibal said politely with a nod of his head. "I'll offer every bit of help I can."

"Wonderful. Then, if you're prepared, we can head down to look at some photos? I've rescheduled a class or two to earn us a free place to work. Beverly and Alana will be joining us. We've got a crack pot team of smart-asses now, let's see if we can't pull up some leads."

The men all smiled at each other as Jack rose, moving to escort them from his office.

Hannibal felt himself tearing at the cages of his cell, clawing at the collar on his neck. Will had gotten far too confident, far too quickly. Whatever amusement the demon had found there was slowly drawing thin. Things were becoming dangerous for Hannibal now and he was a beast cornered. He had one option, an option even he felt was needlessly cruel, but Will had done this to himself. And yet under it all he felt a strange pull that he did not want to acknowledge, a pull he'd felt before with Bedelia. It was a weakening of his demeanor, a tugging at the soul of him that felt emotions more strongly than mortal men. It was the need within him--shared by all his kin--to belong, to be bound so completely that all things were bared and vulnerable. A need to be more mortal, more accepted, more...

# thirty six

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Biblical discussion
Talk of blood

CHAPTER EDIT done on APRIL 24

"--keeping feeling like it is. I've seen some strange things, but this just all feels so surreal." Alana's voice drifted out of the classroom softly. Beverly responded but her voice was harder to understand muffled against the space. Jack led Hannibal and Will confidently into the room, closing the doors behind them.

"No easier when it's more believable, trust me. I'd almost rather stand here and solve jigsaw puzzles all day than go pick up dead, mutilated corpses."

The women both turned their heads as the rest of the team arrived.

"Hannibal." Alana said, pleasantly surprised. Jack lifted his eyebrows.

"You two know each other?"

"Only a little." Hannibal said with a smile, taking his freedom where he could. He moved around to stand on the opposite side of the table from Will, putting himself next to Alana.

"Abigail and I ran into him while he was out shopping with Will."

"He got you to go shopping too?" Jack sighed. "I'm starting to get offended."

"You got me for dinner, Jack."

"In December. Once. And it was more Abigail's doing than mine."

"I'm Agent Katz." Beverly said, raising her voice a little as she took introductions upon herself. She held out a hand for Hannibal. "Beverly."

"It's a pleasure." Hannibal purred.

"Not to sound rude," Alana said quietly, "but Hannibal what are you doing here?"

"He's here with Will." Jack supplied.

"Hannibal is an occult specialist." Will offered, nodding at Hannibal.

"A professor, Will and Jack are under the impression that I might shine some light on what exactly is being attempted here." Hannibal smiled, briefly baring his teeth.

"Now that we all know each other," Jack said, "let's get down to work."

Will turned his eyes to the table. There were hundreds of pictures, crime scene photos and detailed shots of the victims after they'd be transported into FBI custody. They were displayed upon the table like a mosaic, a tribute to Satan in all his Biblical power. He could hear Jack in the back of his head, discussing the various scenes; when they had happened, where they happened, the materials used, anything he thought might be useful. Will didn't need to hear it--it was mostly for Alana and Hannibal's benefit--he'd been there for all of them. He'd seen them all first hand and up close. He could revisit each one in his mind like his own memories if he wanted... which he didn't.

"...and at this point we're just spit balling ideas." Jack finished with a sigh, placing his hands on his hips. "Anything you see that strikes you, let's have it."

"Instantly I see themes of Biblical demonology." Hannibal offered, scanning the photos. "The main sacrifices are women, most of them young and--can probably be assumed--virginal. Their throats slit, blood spilled, very Biblical. These circles have thirteen points on them which, thanks to the Church, has become an unlucky number. The pagans would disagree--and most likely do--but the Christians are louder. Honestly it does have a staged, child-like feel to it. It seems to me that if summoning demons was a reality it wouldn't look anything like this. You could almost expect this, couldn't you. This is a scene from a horror movie."

"Most murders are." Beverly sighed.

"But this seems like it can't possibly be real."

"What else?" Jack slid a few photos around.

"Like Jimmy already said, these circles are identical. Almost supernaturally identical." Beverly said, sliding two pictures out of order to show two circles. "It really feels like that's important."

"It could be the same person responsible? The same person jumping from sacrifice to sacrifice?" Hannibal offered.

"Except we know that can't be true, at least for this first circle. The man responsible for that is dead."

"And you know he worked alone? You know he drew that circle himself?" Hannibal glanced from agent to agent.

"I suppose not definitively." Jack admitted. "But we never found anyone else connected to his crimes. We never found any hints that he did any of it with a partner."

"He acted alone." Will said strongly, eyes jumping from picture to picture. "He couldn't risk getting anyone else involved; he'd have been caught."

"Entertaining the idea, somehow, that it is the same person... He would have done this circle two years ago, almost three. Way before our hacker video, way before this influx of new age cultists." Jack said, tapping a knuckle on the most recent photo. "Where could he have hidden himself for that long? And why lay low only to make a comeback like this?"

"You don't have any information on your Red Dragon, do you?" Hannibal kept his voice remarkably casual. Will glanced over at him, curious. What did Hannibal really see in all these photos? What information would he willingly give to Jack? What information could Will pull from him later?

"Absolutely nothing." Beverly sighed. "No one knows anything. It's like he just... vanished."

"It does seem rather surreal, doesn't it?" Hannibal said, with a slight bittersweet grin. "Everything in our minds rationally telling us there must be some explanation, and yet we keep coming upon these crossroads written in fairy tales."

"Poetically put." Alana said with a smile the two of them shared. Will felt a cold shock run up his spine and quickly returned his eyes to the photos.

"May I... take a stab in the dark?" Hannibal offered, looking to Jack.

"Honestly it's probably our best shot at this point."

"Considering this dragon's ability to remain hidden after so public a broadcast, could you not assume he is a master at hiding his presence? At remaining unseen even in the most public of spectacles?"

"I'd say that's a fair bet, sure." Jack shrugged.

"You are so certain that the man in this first ritual acted alone. Would it really be such a stretch to assume your dragon helped him? That your dragon was hiding amongst all these rituals? You cannot find him even after his face appeared on national television, it would not be hard for you to overlook his involvement in a high profile case."

Jack, Will and Beverly slowly lifted their eyes to Hannibal. Jack and Beverly looked to one another, shell shocked. Will's eyes turned to Hannibal.

"'All we need is a fresh pair of eyes,'" Beverly said, pointing at Jack as she quoted him from a few days earlier, "'we're too involved to see anything else.'"

Hannibal's small smile turned into a flat expression as he met Will's eyes. The expression under dark curls was toxic, dangerous. Hannibal's smirk returned. He knew making any assumptions about the case of Agent Jacob Hobbs would sink into Will's flesh like a blade...

True or not.

# thirty seven

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Some talk of mental issues
Mention of blood
Kidnapping
Car accidents

"Are you angry because I participated?" Hannibal said with a slight chuckle in his voice. Will had not said a word since they'd left FBI HQ. They'd spent the majority of the day inside, working with Jack, Beverly and Alana carefully. They drew out a couple of ideas, a couple loose leads, and Jack had thanked them all repeatedly for their assistance.

"I'm angry because you're leading them on a wild goose chase." Will managed, staring hard out the window like a pouting child.

"And how do you know that? I could very well have told the truth in there."

"Hobbs was not working with the Dragon." Will said stead-fastedly, turning to look at Hannibal. "You just wanted to get to me. You're angry at me, though you're hiding it remarkably well. I must say I'm impressed."

"In that case, I would say I was successful."

"Pull over."

"Will--"

"Pull over!"

Will clenched his jaw as Hannibal sighed, but obeyed. He pulled into a mostly empty gas station, parking near the lot of 18 wheelers fueling up in the back. Hannibal pulled the keys from the ignition and turned to face Will. He lifted his eyebrows. Will met his eyes briefly and then got out of the car. He huffed into the cold air and drew his hands into his hair, letting it run wild between his fingers. He heard Hannibal walk carefully around the car, then pause and lean against it. Will began to pace slightly, making small circles under Hannibal's watchful eyes.

"Perhaps you should sit down." Hannibal offered. "You're getting rather worked up."

"I think I'm permitted to get a little worked up at this point, /Mr/. Lecter." Will spat. "You have completely turned everything I thought I knew on its head."

"Are you still caught on that? Honestly. It used to take men no time at all to accept what was in front of them. And, if we are to be technical, you are the one who turned everything. You seem to forget that you summoned me."

"I haven't forgotten a damned thing." Will hissed, rounding on Hannibal. "Reality and I have-have never been close friends, so I'm incredibly sorry if this is inconvenient for you." He growled low, putting himself close enough to the demon that Hannibal could feel breath over his chin. "I've been grasping at the truth of things my whole life, so it's a little jarring to find out that all those straws I so desperately wanted might have been lies."

"It's left you feeling unstable."

"Among other things." Will turned away and moved to sit on the bumper of the car. He sighed heavily and bent almost in double, pressing his face into his hands. Hannibal remained where he was, leaning in front of the passenger side mirror. The demon let himself drift into thought, knowing it might be best to let Will control the particular situation.

Neither of them took note of the headlights until it was too late. Hannibal narrowed his eyes, catching on first and stepping far enough away from the car that he wasn't leaning on it anymore. On the bumper Will slowly turned his head, struggling to make sense of what he was seeing. Hannibal considered shouting for Will to move but his voice was momentarily stripped from him as the van barrelled into Will's car, t-boning and slamming into the side. Hannibal hit the ground and rolled, Will was knocked completely prone. Hannibal stopped on his stomach and barely lifted himself from the asphalt, eyes sharp on the van.

Will sucked at nothing for a few seconds, attempting to refill his lungs as his head buzzed. He pulled his knees under him and heard a crunching in his pocket. A quick glance down revealed a dark red stain against the inside of his coat--he'd smashed the vial. He lifted his head in time to see three figures dressed all in black jump out of the van. He fumbled quickly for the gun at his side but one of the men was quicker. Coming around behind him he pulled Will's jacket down by the collar, just enough to hinder his arm movements. Will leaned back to try and use the man as leverage to stand, only to have someone in front of him press a cloth to his face. It was soaked in chloroform, wet and cold against his face. He tried to shake them off, pulling his legs free and kicking out frantically. Behind him the man holding him struggled to get a grip eventually shedding Will's coat from him completely. As the world began to spin faster, each rotation making things darker, Will was lifted off the ground. His last conscious thought was that he'd put the vial in one pocket and his wallet in the other.

Hannibal darted around the back of the van, either forgotten or over-looked. He crouched against the back of Will's car and watched as the men dragged him away. He couldn't help a small wince at the sound of grinding parts while the van pulled back--out of Will's car--and screamed down the road. Hannibal stood and glanced down at Will's jacket. He picked it up and shook it off, frowning at the large blood stain in one pocket. He removed Will's wallet from the other side and flipped it open; the stitched circle was still there, tucked between dollar bills. The demon ran his thumb over the fabric and sighed. He flipped the wallet closed and stuffed it into his own pants pocket.

He returned to the car and removed his cell phone--purchased shortly after his trip to the barber--and flipped it open. He pressed his thumb to the screen and closed his eyes.

He imagined a dark and intimidating man. A man with short hair and a salt and pepper beard. A man with power and influence both in job description and in loyalty. He imagined Jack Crawford, and the phone rang.

"This is Crawford, go."

"Jack!" Hannibal panted, pressing a hand to his throat roughly, "Jack they took Will!"

"W-what? Who is this? Hannibal?" A short pause. "Who took Will?"

"I didn't--I didn't see them. Please, hurry."

After giving Jack his location Hannibal clicked off the phone. He rested back against the driver's side seat and closed his eyes. The security cameras would not pick up the accident from where they were positioned; that was fine. Hannibal could feel where Will was, and though he had told Jack the truth about the identity of the assailants, he'd also omitted that he knew what they wanted. Will wouldn't be killed. This was a threat, not an action. The men had smelled so powerfully of sulfur Hannibal could pick them up a mile away. They knew the FBI was getting close and they were going to try and use Will to stop that forward motion.

In spite of his current state of affairs, Hannibal did hope that Will had enough sass left to give them an earful.

# thirty eight

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Mention of blood
Brief mention of mental illness

Abigail frowned as she watched Hannibal press a hand into his temple, leaning back in the chair of Jack's office with a weight like the world on his shoulder. Alana sat next to him, hand on his arm, speaking quietly as if they'd been friends as long as he and Will had been friends. She thought he was handsome--Abigail knew better. Jack's voice was rough, swallowing desperation as he continued his conversation on the phone. Abigail shifted her weight slightly, leaning against the back wall just like Will always did. She turned her head to stare into the hallway through the door.

They had nothing to go on aside from Hannibal's statement and a blurry few seconds of an unmarked van in the security camera footage. Will's jacket had been sent downstairs to be studied, picked clean for any shred of evidence. Hannibal seemed reluctant to let go of it, more for emotional needs than suspicious ones. They'd found nothing and Hannibal had told them as much. The men had been wearing black gloves, they would not have left fingerprints.

Abigail moved her eyes back to the desk as Jack hung up. He rubbed his eyes.

"I've got everyone we could spare on the roads. We're trying to see if we can find this van on any other cameras; trying to find a plate number, anything. We've caught up with a handful of people who say they saw the crash, but the way the cars were positioned they didn't see anything. The van blocked it all, precise and purposeful."

"It can't be a coincidence." Alana said in quiet horror. "It has to be related to these killings."

"We don't know that yet."

"Jack, with respect, I don't think denying it is going to help us." Hannibal whispered, voice still hoarse and raw. "If we start thinking in that box we might be able to come up with ideas."

Jack nodded slowly and leaned back in his chair. Hannibal sighed heavily.

"I feel positively useless." He shook his head. "I was too stunned to move until it was too late."

"Don't blame yourself, Hannibal." Alana soothed, rubbing his arm once more. "You're not trained for this; there was nothing you could have done."

"You got us what you could," Jack agreed, "descriptions of the men, what you could remember about the car, the time and place. That's all we could ask for."

"I still wish there was more I could have done."

"The cornfield." Abigail said, moving away from the wall. All eyes turned to her.

"Abigail?" Alana said.

"Send officers to the cornfield."

"What cornfield?"

"/The/ cornfield." Abigail crossed her arms tightly over her chest. "The basement isn't accessible, and the community center is too destroyed to provide any kind of cover. They could have taken him to the cornfield."

Jack, Alana and Hannibal exchanged looks. Hannibal let out a slow breath.

"There is a full moon tonight, Jack. If our only lead is these ritual killers it might make sense. The full moon is often used as a symbol of power, rebirth and the exposing of secrets. If they are trying to intimidate Will, it would be a good place to take him. He--did have an episode in the field also, didn't he?" Hannibal looked to Jack, who nodded. Alana looked quickly from one man to the other.

"He had an episode? Why didn't anyone tell me!"

"It wasn't important, it wasn't--not a real episode, Alana. He just got spooked."

"Spooked how?" Alana pressed. "Jack, spooked how?"

"He--he connected with the killer is spooked how."

"Jack," Alana hissed, "you should have--you should have told me. That was months ago! No wonder he's in the state he's in! You /know/ what happened to him last time!"

"I know--I know. Mistakes I can't undo. You can beat me up later. I'm going to make some calls, give Abigail's hunch a shot."

"I have a few EMT friends, some ER contacts. I'm going to start ringing warning bells..." Alana and Jack rose. Hannibal moved to follow them and Abigail reached out to gently grab his arm.

"We'll--I'm going to take Hannibal to the cafeteria, ok? He looks like he could use a strong coffee or something." Abigail smiled up at Hannibal, who returned the expression.

"Good idea. I'll be down to join you two in just a second." Alana nodded before vanishing down the hall with Jack.

Abigail could feel Hannibal watching her curiously as she led them down the hallways. She felt her stomach tie itself in knots, her breathing became shallow and her face flushed. She began wringing her hands.

"Abigail? Are you all right?"

"Yes." She answered quickly. Hannibal held open the doors to the cafeteria for her. She glanced up and let out a slow breath of relief--it was empty. She made her way towards a vending machine and selected a few items at random. A few feet behind her she could hear Hannibal pouring himself coffee. She chose a table for them in the far corner, near a window.

"Why didn't you go after him?" She said quietly, after a second. Hannibal tilted his head, he looked mildly offended.

"I couldn't, you know that. His car wouldn't start. I couldn't chase them down on foot."

"Couldn't you?" Abigail whispered, slowly looking up to meet Hannibal's eyes. "You could have been inside that van if you wanted..." She paused, looking down at the coffee cup held between his hands, "unless he didn't have it with him. Unless it was in his jacket."

"Unless what was in his jacket, Abigail?"

"The circle." Once more, slowly and shakily, Abigail met Hannibal's eyes. He smiled slightly.

"I recognized the haze on you in the grocery store." He purred. "I was wondering when you'd tell me."

"That doesn't answer why you wouldn't go after him. You could have, couldn't you?"

"No, is the simple answer. The circle was in his jacket pocket, discarded on the ground. He had made me a vial, but it was crushed in the attack."

"They didn't find any blood..."

"I know." Hannibal smiled.

"You could still go find him. I know you know where he is. If you have the circle with you--and you must--we could go. You and I, and get him."

"That would blow my cover, Abigail, and Will's. You know what that could mean. I was loathe to let him go but I had no choice. Your... insightful hunch to Jack moments ago will see a quick resolution to the whole thing. Then we can put this nasty business behind us."

"He's ok?"

"He's frightened, understandably so, but relatively unharmed. If I felt his life was in danger, I would move, cover or no." Hannibal paused. "How close were you?"

"I--wasn't, not very. I helped him research. I helped him find out and study and--build. I never killed any of them, I never helped him do that and he never asked me to. Not until the last one. He was out of time and-and backed into a corner. He thought because I knew so much that I would be the one to bring it through."

"But Jack and Will stopped him."

"I'm... still not sure who benefited from all that." Abigail said quietly. "Sometimes I think it would have been nice to see one, to have crossed over and fallen like that. To know that power."

"It is a beautiful thing. Perhaps one day I shall show you."

Abigail looked up and a slow grin spread on her face, mirrored in Hannibal's expression.

# thirty nine

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nudity
Kidnapping
Intimidation techniques
Animal abuse?

Will slowly let his eyes open. Fear did not settle in immediately. He felt himself nude, exposed and bound wrists and ankles. He was fairly certain he was outside. Yet fear did not settle in. His eyes were covered, his mouth gagged and yet his body was calm and relaxed. His mind was used to waking up in weird places, used to visiting strange scenarios that Will had never actually been in. A disconnect here and there, a disassociative episode once or twice a week and it left Will's mind unable to comprehend most actual dangers. Will so often put himself in dangerous situations for a chance to understand them that his body was becoming numb to the idea that his own life was being threatened.

Until suddenly, with all the noise and clarity of a freight train, fear arrived.

Will was nude, bound at the wrists and ankles, gagged and blindfolded and outside. The last thing he knew to be true was the attack in the gas station parking lot. He began tossing his head frantically, trying to remove the blindfold. It caught in his hair and pulled but he continued his efforts. He rolled to his back and tried to bring his hands up to assist him only to find they were tied to his ankles. He was forced in a bowed position, almost fetal. He worked his tongue around the gag in his mouth and tried to push it free, but like the blindfold it did not move.

"To save us all some time, I'll tell you straight that struggling won't do you any good."

Will paused. The voice sounded bare in the open air, coming from somewhere above his head. Will jerked to the side as he felt a hand slowly touch his left cheek, almost a tender brush of fingers.

"Just relax and this will be over very soon."

Will renewed his struggling and heard the voice sigh. He was making too much noise in his own head to understand the few soft, almost annoyed orders given but he did hear feet approaching him. He poured all his effort into trying to surge away from the hands as they grabbed him, spun him and sat him up. He winced as the blindfold was pulled roughly off his head.

"If I promise that we're not going to kill you, will that quiet you down?" The voice said, again with the same kind of quiet annoyance.

Will's eyes grew wide as he let them focus in on the man speaking before him. He sat on a blanket on the ground, like they were having some kind of picnic. He was dressed in all black from head-to-toe but wore what looked like a porcelain mask from Mardi Gras. Will turned his head quickly around to see the men at his side dressed in the same fashion. Another quick look around and Will knew he was in the cornfield.

"We're just out here to have a little chat." The masked man continued, waiting until Will turned to look at him. "I'm sure by now your little FBI buddies are on the way so I really have to make this quick. You are all in way-way over your heads. It's a shame really, they seem like such nice heads. I mean, you're all a bunch of highly educated individuals, doing what you do. You catch those little monsters running around, stabbing each other in the dark. Good on you. If you'd like to continue doing that, I'm going to need you to back off these... ritual killings. Ok? Can you do that for me?"

Will narrowed his eyes slightly. Pressing his tongue against the gag once more he shook his head. A definitive 'no'. The masked man sighed.

"See I, well I just knew you were gonna say that. Shame really. Ok, I'll try and spell this out for you a touch more. I can tell you're touched, or you've seen them, or whatever. I'm still honing my own skills, so to speak, but you can't hide from me, Agent Graham. I know you're on the enlightened side of things. Makes this easier. You see, there is so much more going on here than you realize! There are teams of men--hundreds strong--fighting these fights like we have been for hundreds of years and your little FBI brigade is really just getting in the way. You're not helping anyone, in fact, I'll tell you the truth you've actually killed a couple people who didn't need to die. Stings, doesn't it? Oh, you haven't found them yet, but you will."

Will leaned back slightly, held in place by the men at his sides. The masked man stood and moved forward, crouching in front of Will and staring at him with dark eyes through holes in porcelain.

"You convince your little FBI friends to drop this whole thing, and I'll make you a promise: All your little friends will be safe and I won't tell anybody your secret. Sound fair? On the other hand, if I hear you're all still snooping around I'm going to have to start taking you out. I can't have you interrupting things, not when we're so close!" Will tried once more to lean away as the masked man reached up and cupped Will's face in a hand. "We're on your side, so help us out and back off. You're just making things worse."

Will winced as the man patted his face roughly and then stood up.

"All right boys, let's pack it up and get home before we get got."

Will toppled to his side as the men at his back stood up. He lifted his head to watch them trail the masked man through the corn stalks. He strained to listen as they chatted amongst themselves, walked into the gravel on the other side of the field and drove off. Will panted hotly against the gag in his mouth and lay still for a long moment. He felt like he had heard

that voice before, but nothing came to mind. He closed his eyes and took a few slow, deep breaths.

He'd said the FBI was on their way, though how he knew that or how the FBI would have tracked him out here, Will didn't know. But he told himself it couldn't be true and he was on his own. He didn't think it was cold enough to freeze--though his body really wanted him to believe otherwise--but the idea of spending the day bare in the sun was not a pleasant one. He might be able to roll himself in one direction, but he didn't know how far he could get through the thick cornstalks. He didn't know which direction the farm was in, and if he made it to the gravel on the short side would that be worth it? It was a backwoods road, hardly traveled. How likely was it that someone would spot him?

Will opened his eyes slowly and stared blankly ahead. At least he wasn't hallucinating, which he supposed was a comfort. Somehow his real life had started to feel very much like his hallucinations. He lifted his head as he heard cornstalks crunching in front of him. Melding out of the shadows to be suddenly bathed in moonlight, the stag stepped into the clearing. It wore a bridle and bit like a horse, made of leather and pulled too tight. Under Will's gaze it dug it's hooves into the ground in frustration, throwing it's head and rubbing it's muzzle on it's forelimbs.

At a loss for what else to do Will stretched out his fingers as if to help, knowing he could manage to wiggle his fingers only a foot or so away from his body. The stag froze, watching Will's hands. It trotted forward and slowly bowed itself into a position to mirror Will's. It lay on its side, legs curled under it, and stretched it's head towards Will's moving fingers. Will felt the heat of the beast's breath along his belly, a slight moisture as the creatures flaring nose hit his skin. His fingers brushed over soft fur, broken by leather pulled too tight. He slid his hands as the beast turned it's head, running it's nose further along Will's chest, until his fingers found the latch. He pulled it slightly, turning the stag's head sharply. The beast snorted against his chest, the hot air breaking on Will's chin. Will worked his fingers against the metal clasp and felt the leather slip free.

The beast shook it's head and the bridle went flying. It immediately moved to it's feet and shook it's head again, testing the limits of it's new freedom. It looked at Will. It snorted and lifted it's front half off the ground with a hollow cry more like a man than a beast, slicing it's hooves at the air. Shadow broken against the starry sky the stag fell away into a swarm of moths which broke apart and scattered in the wind.

Will slowly let his head rest on the earth, staring at nothing. He could still feel the beast's breath against his stomach, warm and wet and real.

# forty

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nudity

Hannibal found himself staring almost listlessly out the window as Jack drove them towards Abigail's hunch. Much to the young girl's displeasure everyone had insisted she remain behind, in case they ran into trouble. Hannibal assured her he would let her know the moment they found anything. Reluctantly she had obeyed.

He was curious what she would do now, now that she had told him. None of her guardians knew she'd been involved with what her father had done, and Hannibal could tell it was quite a weight off her chest to tell someone. To tell him meant she and her father had done extensive research; not just anyone would so openly trust a demon with such a dark secret. She knew a great deal... in fact she knew perhaps too much. Hannibal would quickly have to win her favor or something of the kind to protect himself. He imagined he could easily use Will as a barter in this way, though he could never directly threaten Will in front of Abigail. Perhaps he could make Abigail realize how good he was for Will, how much Will needed him. He imagined she would keep his secrets--no matter how dark--if she thought he had Will's best interests at heart.

And who was to say he didn't? Will had gotten in the way and was continuing to stomp across Hannibal's plans, but that didn't mean the demon wanted him dead, per say. Hannibal didn't want to give it much thought until he knew what running himself in circles would accomplish.

"If Abigail is right," Jack said from behind the wheel, "we need that girl on the force yesterday." His voice carried a dark chuckle. He was trying to keep the mood light, and the soft snort of air from Alana told Hannibal she wanted it to be.

"She's always been smart."

"This is a different kind of smart. This is a Will kind of smart." Jack pressed, turning down the dirty back road. "I've never seen anybody but him make these kinds of conclusions."

"Some people just have a knack for monsters." Hannibal supplied from the back. Alana turned to look at him curiously.

The air was thick with tension pooling between Alana and Jack. Hannibal tried to mirror their body language, but the stress was all fabricated from his end. He knew Will was waiting for

them in the field. He knew Will was completely unharmed, physically at least. He'd done a fair share of acting in his summoned days, he wasn't worried they would catch on. He was worried about how they would feel about Abigail after learning she was right. Will had gotten away with things because of his abnormalities. No one questioned the weird things that he did because--to them--he had always been weird and so it seemed to make sense. Unfortunately for Abigail she was far too normal, even with everything she had gone through. This hunch of her's was a long shot, and Hannibal had a feeling it would turn heads.

It would also turn her to him, and Hannibal planned to stoke that fire if given the opportunity.

"Those are fresh tire tracks." Jack said quickly as they pulled onto gravel. He and Alana nearly leapt out of the car before he could put it in park and remove the keys. Hannibal followed moving to stick next to Alana as Jack pulled free his gun and a flashlight. The three squad cars following them pulled quickly in behind Jack. They no longer had the element of surprise but clearly that had not been their intent. Hannibal suspected they were less than half sure they would find anything out here. The other officers were just a precaution, more to show they were out and actually doing something than anything. As was made abundantly clear by Hannibal and Alana's presence, as they were not agents and as such should not have been present.

Jack glanced at all the officers and pointed at two of them.

"You two, drive around and take the first right. Go let the land owner know we're here, and what we're doing. Everyone else, on me, nice and slow."

Everyone started forward as a single unit, Alana and Hannibal hanging behind a good few paces at Jack's back. Hannibal could hear Alana's heart racing, fear and anxiety running through her blood. He reached over and tenderly touched her hand. As she looked at him he squeezed it with a soft smile. She seemed a little taken aback, but returned the gesture.

Jack kept his flashlight down, shifting it back and forth through the dirt. He felt his heart start to race and he wasn't sure why. Every bit of experience in him told him that they wouldn't find anything. It just didn't make sense, but somehow his body knew something his mind didn't. The tire tracks in gravel were fresh but this was a well kept farm, the tracks could have easily been from a farm hand or the farmer himself. But as his flashlight swept the ground he found leaves--green and freshly ripped--scattered along the dirt next to the unmistakable sink of fresh foot prints.

He stepped into the clearing and drew his flashlight along where the ground had been cut bare to prepare for new seeds. The light slowly drifted onto the prone form of Will Graham, blue eyes wincing against it. Jack pulled his flashlight away and darted forward.

"I got him!"

Alana and Hannibal burst into the clearing, the other officers all swarming in as well. Hannibal and Jack worked to sit Will up, the later quickly removing his coat to cover him with. Hannibal unlatched the gag and let it fall to the ground.

"Jack?" Will said groggily. "How did you...?"

"I'll tell you later. Let's focus on getting you out of here."

Hannibal braced Will against his knee as Alana pulled a pocket knife from her jacket. The men gave her impressed looks as she made quick work of the bindings on Will's wrists and ankles. Will shakily pulled Jack's jacket around himself as Hannibal and Jack helped him to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" Hannibal asked softly.

"No. They just wanted to deliver a message." Will stumbled against the arms supporting him. Hannibal and Jack led him carefully through the gravel.

"What message?" Alana whispered, eyes still drawing over Will again and again to make sure he was in one piece.

"'Back off.'" Will said shortly, almost sounding amused.

"Did you see any faces? Recognize anyone?"

"No it was--there were three of them. Only one spoke but he wore a mask, they all did. I feel like I've heard his voice before but I can't remember from where."

"Do you think they were participants? Our ringleader, maybe?"

"I don't think so, Jack." Will whispered, carefully taking a seat in the back of Jack's car. Hannibal stood next to him while Jack leaned on the door. Alana moved to pull a blanket out of the trunk. Will modestly swapped it out and handed Jack his coat.

"Why not?"

"This guy said he was on our side. He was inferring there's some kind of war going on between two groups, I don't know he sounded... delusional." The word tasted like irony on Will's tongue. "He said the FBI was just getting in the way. He threatened to start killing us off if we didn't back off."

"Well, that sure as hell isn't going to happen. You think this could be a rival cult?"

"No." Will pulled his legs into the car and leaned back, closing his eyes. "I think we need to talk to Freddie Lounds."

# forty one

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Explicit sexual content
Frotting
Oral sex
Sex under questionable mental states

-Possible triggers for an abuse of a relationship, since no one in their right mind would have sex with Will in the state that he's in.

The sun was just starting to rise as Hannibal parked the rental in Will's driveway. The glanced over at his summoner, asleep and dressed in the only baggy clothes the FBI had to spare. He had an hour or two of adrenaline filled dialogue with Jack and whomever else would listen, and then he crashed. They came up with a few good game plans, then insisted Hannibal take Will home, even if Will assured them he didn't need to. Abigail had wanted to go with them but Hannibal insisted she stay. Jack seemed eager to talk with her about her hunch, and Hannibal told her it would be best to work with Jack instead of try and hide from him.

Hannibal reached over and gently put a hand on Will's arm.

"Will." He said softly, shaking the other man just a bit, "we're home."

Will slowly pried his eyes open, wearing the expression of a man out too late doing questionable things. He seemed to take a second to process before nodding softly. He glanced over at Hannibal, sidelong without making real eye contact, and weakly opened his door. Hannibal tried not to herd him like a sheepdog as Will weaved his way up the path to his front door. The demon did strategically place himself behind Will, close enough so that when the dogs poured onto the porch that Will tipped back into Hannibal and not onto the ground.

Both men were surprised that the contact lasted so long. Will's shoulder barely hit Hannibal's chest, but he made no move to step away. Hannibal tilted his head down just slightly as Will's eyes began to drift closed once more. The demon placed a hand on Will's right bicep.

"Inside, Will. You can't sleep on the porch."

Will let Hannibal steer him inside. His steps felt heavy and wet but Hannibal behind him felt comforting. He felt wrapped in the stag's too tight bridle with Hannibal's hands carefully freeing the leather. He complied as Hannibal turned him around and gently pressed down on his shoulders to get him to sit.

"Take off those ridiculous clothes. I'll get you a glass of water." Hannibal instructed calmly, watching as Will nodded.

It was easy enough to kick off the over-sized shoes and pull the shirt over his head. He felt sore muscles protest, having been bound and fighting for too long. He dropped the shirt on the floor and laid back on his bed. In what he was sure was a completely mature maneuver he wiggled free of the pants and kicked them into the pile he'd made on the floor. He covered his face with his hands.

Hannibal frowned slightly as he walked back into the room to find Will, nude and reclining.

"Are you just going to sleep like that?"

"Maybe."

"I think that would be a bad idea." Hannibal set the glass of water down on the nightstand. He leaned forward and grabbed Will's wrists, pulling him gently to a seated position. The demon frowned as he turned Will's hands palm-up and ran his thumbs over the bright, angry red marks on Will's skin.

"If I'd let you have the vial from the beginning you could have stopped them."

"Yes."

"Would you have?"

"Your kidnapping served me no purpose. Of course I would have."

"Your binding doesn't manifest physically, does it?" Will said quietly, watching Hannibal study his wrists.

"Not obviously." Hannibal responded vaguely. "It feels physical."

"Like a bit and bridle?"

"More like a pronged collar." Hannibal smiled slightly as he met Will's eyes.

"Is there a way I can..." Will paused and reached out to grab Hannibal's tie. The demon watched him carefully. "Loosen the collar without setting you free?"

"Perhaps." Hannibal breathed quietly, watching Will pull the tie to force Hannibal to bend.

The demon made no struggle to free himself as Will leaned up and completed the kiss Hannibal had tried to give him in the kitchen. Hannibal kept his hands on Will's wrists, barely capturing them in his palms. Will moved one hand off the tie to soothe over Hannibal's neck. It had been years since he'd kissed anyone--romantically, at least--and it felt strange and chaste. It felt like testing the water instead of testing a bond. It wasn't at all what Will wanted. As they pulled away to breathe, as Hannibal tilted his head back to speak, Will grabbed the back of the demon's head and pulled him down into a rougher kiss. He pushed himself into Hannibal as much as their positions would permit.

Hannibal found himself slightly taken aback as Will began to tilt back onto the bed. With a strong hand still wrapped up in his silk tie, Hannibal had no choice but to follow. He permitted himself a soft descent onto the bed, shrouding Will from the rest of the room. He could feel the man's heat burning through his clothing and he gently broke away from Will's mouth.

"I think this is a very bad idea, Will."

"Why?" Will whispered, moving his hand to stroke the front of Hannibal's throat. He felt the demon swallow.

"You're grasping for comfort, emotional stability. You've been through a traumatic few days, Will. This is not the way to deal with those things."

"You're not a therapist."

"Decidedly I am not." Hannibal conceded.

"Then don't lecture me." Will lifted himself up and released Hannibal's tie. He pressed his lips to the skin around Hannibal's throat and left a sucking bruise in his wake. He slipped his hands up and over Hannibal's shoulders, taking the demon's jacket with him. There was no reluctance.

Hannibal lifted himself onto his knees to disrobe, looking down at Will as he did so. Will put on a show of power, of confidence but Hannibal could see right through it. The man was shaken, falling and terrified. He was unstable in all things and looking for something to cling to. By pretending as if he were the one in control he could find some stability in Hannibal's stead fast steps. Will had only known Hannibal as confident, sure of himself and stable and that was what he wanted now. Sex was an added bonus, and would only further Hannibal's intentions. It did make the demon wish he'd taken a moment to think in circles earlier, however.

Will felt himself slipping away as he watched Hannibal remove his clothing. He tried to count the buttons as Hannibal's fingers undid them; he imagined the weight of the shirt being removed. He wondered how much of this he would actually get to participate in when Hannibal seemed to figure out what was going on. Will's eyes became half lidded as Hannibal moved slowly backwards, off the bed. Will opened his mouth to protest when Hannibal knelt between Will's knees. Will watched the man's shoulders roll as he removed his pants and discarded them before leaning forward and pressing thin lips to the inside of Will's left thigh.

Hannibal lifted his gaze to catch Will's. He watched the man slowly sink back into himself, like a ghost repossessing a body. He placed another kiss further up on Will's thigh, watching dark pupils swallow blue eyes. Hannibal broke eye contact as he slid his hands up Will's calves to catch at the back of his knees. There were quick seconds of hesitation, of resistance, as he manipulated Will's body but the other man gave in with a heavy sigh. Hannibal watched Will close his eyes and tilt his head back, offering Hannibal a view of his throat like a plate of the finest gourmet food. The demon tipped his head forward and placed a kiss just at the junction of hip and thigh.

Will was suddenly deafened to everything but the sound of his own gasping, as if he had submerged his head underwater. Sex had always been difficult for him, even when he'd been a teenager more whacked out on hormones than medications. He couldn't concentrate on anything, and then it was full concentration on one thing, then it was not enough, then too much and before he knew it he was watching the whole thing from another place. His few partners didn't know the extent of his 'issues' and couldn't work around that. Hannibal was different, Hannibal knew and as Will sucked in a breath he could tell Hannibal would keep him grounded, stable.

Hannibal placed his hands on Will's hips, holding the other man down with a small amount of effort. He leaned in and took Will's nearly hard member into his mouth, the sound this small affection wrought from the man made Hannibal glance up curiously. All he was able to see was the jut of Will's chin, the curve of his chest as his back arched. He pressed his thumbs in circles along Will's hips, nose ruffled in pubic hair. Hannibal didn't think he would ever understand the emphasis humans put on sex. It was a beautiful, wonderful thing but it was certainly not the pinnacle of all things, as most society seemed to think it was. What marvels humans ignored for the sake of sex.

Will felt Hannibal's mouth encompassing less of him as the moments dragged on, wonderful and torturous. Fully aroused he was blessed with the sensation of Hannibal gently rolling his testicles in his hand, thumb stroking lovingly along. Will took the risk of opening his eyes, tilting his head to watch Hannibal for a few seconds. The demon knew what he was doing and Will watched the smooth, rhythmic bobbing of his head which matched the frantic thumping of his heart. He felt his fingers begin to tingle and he closed his eyes again to keep anchored. He didn't know where he wanted this to go--aside from the obvious--and he pushed down thoughts of regret in favor of pleasure.

Hannibal slowly lifted his head, letting Will's now full erection slip wetly from between his lips. He pressed a quick kiss to the head before moving to join Will, crawling on top of him slowly and leaving a trail of kisses on bare flesh. It felt like supplication but at the same time it felt like establishing a claim on something. Will held Hannibal's leash--a power that was slowly becoming real for the summoner--but Hannibal still kept most of the control. Will pointed but Hannibal was the power of the action. Hannibal pressed his lips to the side of Will's cheek, brushing his mouth over stubble as he lifted and shifted his legs to rest himself between Will's thighs.

"Diogenes of Sinope once accused Alexander the Great of being ruled by his childhood friend Hephaestion's thighs," Hannibal said quietly, mouth moving against Will's jaw, "if they were at all like yours, Will, I can easily see the risk."

Will let out a hoarse laugh, unaware one could laugh during sex as Hannibal turned kisses to his throat. His laughter turned to a deep groan as Hannibal rolled against him. He'd been unaware the demon had been nursing his own erection while working up Will's, but now as they rubbed along one another the man found himself wildly familiar with Hannibal's arousal. A soft 'ooh' was pulled from Will's chest as Hannibal repeated the action. Will slowly, tentatively let his arms snake up to splay wide across Hannibal's back. He could feel muscle rolling and working under his fingers as the demon began to rock them together, grinding towards completion without penetration.

Hannibal rested himself half on his elbows and half with his chest pressed to Will's. The sweat gathering between them let him glide like a well oiled machine. He felt Will's hands clutching at his back, desperate but cautious as if Will was unsure if you were supposed to hold another man in that way. To answer the silent question Hannibal shifted his weight to his left arm and gripped the right into Will's hair, petting him and his wild curls. Hannibal curled his hips into a thrust and watched as Will gasped in response, a sort of strangled cry that was not quite a moan but not quite a shout. The demon curled his hip again for a repeat performance and Will did not let him down.

Will got the impression he was being played like an instrument as he gave up on trying to retain composure. He bent his legs up onto the bed, clutched at Hannibal's shoulder and let the demon dig him into the mattress. He could feel his end approaching but his mind was caught up in the everything else. Hannibal had tried to keep himself composed just as Will had, but the demon began breaking towards the end. Will could hear him panting against his jaw, his ear, calm and collected mystique crumbling away. Breath caught in Will's throat, his heels dug into the mattress and he clenched his teeth to growl out a noise, climaxing into the curl of Hannibal's hip.

Will frowned as he took a seat across the room, watching Hannibal plant strange, tiny kisses along William's forehead. He wasn't sure when exactly he'd displaced, but he knew it was enough to take away the fulfillment of orgasm. He had very little to be resentful of as he found himself drifting off. The last thing he remembered seeing was Hannibal's mouth open on William's throat while the demon came, teeth bared.

# forty two

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Self depreciating thoughts
Mentions of disassociative disorder

*Jacob Hobbs frowned as he moved to sit next to Will. They were--yet again--removed enough from the scene to be out of the way, Jack always made sure Will had room to re-connect. It should have felt strange to sit on the steps outside someone else's house, to stare out at someone else's front yard, but it didn't. Hobbs had a hard time letting his mind dwell on the poor couple being scooped up--literally--inside when Will was obviously so clouded.*

*"You with me, Will?" Hobbs said gently, turning his head to watch Will nod. He frowned and chewed on his bottom lip for a moment.*

*"You... don't have to hold back on my account." Will said with a small smile of despair. He stared ahead as he heard Hobbs shake his head.*

*"What was it about this one, Will? What's so different about this?"*

*"It's not... it's not just this one. It's the one I know comes after this, and the one that comes after that one." Will let out a sigh like a tremor. "It's getting easier to look but the thinking is shutting down. I don't know how much more of this I can take. I don't know how much longer I'll be useful to Jack."*

*"Why does that scare you? You should be excited to retire early. The state should owe you some kind of bonus for everything you've done so far." Hobbs tried to joke, leaning into Will just a little.*

*"Jack he... he needs me for this. He knows--I know, we all know--nobody does what I do. I save lives and he..." Will paused to lick his lips. "If I'm not doing it..."*

*"Jack won't resent you for stepping away, Will. He's your friend, he'll understand. We all will. I know he tends to aim you like a gun, but we all know what a heavy toll this takes on you." Hobbs reached over and put a hand on Will's knee. "I know how tough this is on you. I see you enough to notice when it really sinks in, when you really can't forget. You can't do this the rest of your life; we all knew your expiration date would be before ours."*

*"My... expiration date?" Will sighed and looked over at Hobbs, knitting his brows together. The men chuckled lightly at each other.*

*"Bad choice of words." Hobbs laughed, moving his hand from Will's knees to wrap over his shoulder. He pulled Will into a sideways embrace.*

*"I know this makes you feel abnormal or unstable, Will, but I want you to know that I'm here if you need solid ground. Your pillars might be sand but I'm bedrock."*

Will's eyes slowly fluttered open. He stared for a long moment up at the ceiling. As was becoming normal he let his mind wander through what he considered memories, trying to piece together the ones that were real and discard the ones that weren't. His body ached. He blinked slowly and turned his head.

He was surprised that he /wasn't/ surprised to see Hannibal there, still asleep. Sex with the demon had settled easier in Will's mind than other details about the previous night. Will let his blue eyes study over the demon's face, so close to human as he slept. Hannibal had told Will that sleeping, eating, other bodily functions would be necessary for him while he chose to remain human. As long as he chose that form he would also appear to age but any swap back to his original form and all that was lost. None of that was even slightly apparent as he slept.

Will thought about reaching over to touch Hannibal's cheek. He almost wanted it to be a tender wake up call, but it felt flat in his gut and so he refrained. He rolled onto his side and let his eyes drift over the rest of the room. The pile of clothes he knew he'd left at the edge of the bed were gone. Winston and Buster were just beginning to stir, meaning Hannibal must have also fed them before turning in. Will wasn't sure if it was easier or harder that the demon decided to play house while he was under Will's command. He wondered if maybe that was the idea.

Carefully--so that he didn't wake Hannibal--Will slipped out of the bed. He felt a little odd being naked in front of his yawning dogs, like they would find him indecent like most people did. He turned and quickly padded through the kitchen, up the stairs to the shower. He left the water cold, he wanted it to bite. He wanted the shower to hurt. He wanted to punish himself for finding such pleasure last night, though he didn't think that to himself in so many words. He didn't really deserve it and he knew he shouldn't have enjoyed himself. He couldn't take it back--didn't want to take it back--so this was how he intended to repent. To whom he was repenting he didn't know.

A few moments later he wiped at the fogged mirror with his hand, sighing at the tired version of himself he saw looking back at him. He wanted to recognize the face but it still just didn't click. That was what other people saw? When he spoke those were the lips that moved? He tilted his head slowly to one side and frowned heavily at a large, angry bruise on his throat. He traced it with his fingers and knew it would be roughly the size of Hannibal's mouth. It was too high to cover with a regular shirt collar.

By the time he made it downstairs--dry and clothed--breakfast was cooking.

"Good morning," Hannibal said cheerfully, but not /overly/ cheerful. Will nodded and repeated the greeting as he took a seat.

"Are you aware," Hannibal began, never turning from the stove, "that you talk in your sleep?"

"Do I? Do I say anything interesting?" Will glanced curiously at the demon.

"I tend to find everything you say interesting, Will." Hannibal complimented easily. "You mentioned William. You seemed rather envious of him."

"I suppose envious is one way to describe it." Will said, more into his glass of water than to Hannibal. He kept the glass against his lips longer than necessary, not sure if he wanted to further this conversation. Not now, maybe not ever. He'd never told anyone about 'William'. It was both exciting and horrible to consider opening up to Hannibal of all people about something so personal first.

"William is you, isn't he? When we first met you near physically recoiled at the idea of me calling you William." Hannibal smiled pleasantly as he set Will's breakfast in front of him. "I imagine there is a great deal of emotion tied in there someplace, knotted like an old tree."

"For an otherworldly being you certainly have a lot of insight into the human mind."

"Humans and demons do not think so differently." Hannibal purred as he joined Will. "If not for the fact that we exist on different planes, we would be nearly indistinguishable from one another." Will chuckled.

"I bet."

"You don't have to tell me. I was simply attempting to make conversation."

"It--yeah, William is me. Or, was me. My father called me William."

"Your mother did not?"

"She didn't like the name. She--labor was hard. They weren't sure she was going to pull through so, she wasn't conscious when I was born. She and my father they had kind of planned around the possibility of her not living through my birth so... I'd like to think he named me William in his grief but it was more than likely just him trying to get back at my mother for another percieved betrayal." Will paused and quickly stuffed his mouth full of eggs so that he wouldn't say any more.

"Why didn't she like the name?" Hannibal pressed casually. He glanced up as Will hesitated, fork in his mouth. For a second it didn't seem like he would answer, and then, quietly, the demon heard his voice.

"It was the name of the man who maimed her."

"Maimed her?" Hannibal echoed cautiously.

"Accidental, sort of. Drunk driver. Can-can we not do this?" Will glanced up and over and Hannibal lifted his hands in surrender.

"I apologize." Hannibal reached down and gave Winston a good few pats before returning to his breakfast. "Alana and Jack are insistent that you see this Dr.Chilton. They have both

texted me a number of times, suggesting that if you will not listen to them that perhaps you will listen to me."

"They've been texting you?" Will scrunched up his face. Hannibal reached into his own shirt pocket and pulled out a small, very modern cell phone. Will snorted. He still had an old flip phone.

"Why are you hesitating?"

"I don't like therapists. I don't--I don't want anyone in my head. /I/ don't want to be in my head. I build forts," Will tapped his temple, "it takes too much effort to keep the walls guarded and my mouth shut. One or the other is going to come down and neither outcome is desirable."

"You're very good at distancing yourself from people, Will." Hannibal sighed, leaning back in his chair. "It might be beneficial for you to open up to someone. With a therapist at least you don't have to worry about maintaining a relationship after delving into your deepest, darkest secrets."

"I'm not... I'm not telling anyone my deepest, darkest secretes, PH.D or not. And I don't need to open up. I'm fine. This is fine." Will frowned a little harder, eyebrows knitting together as Hannibal stood. He watched the demon gather their plates.

"Make the appointment, Will. Keeping yourself so distant isn't healthy."

"And now you're my doctor?" Will said quietly, as Hannibal hadn't moved from picking up his plate. The demon sighed down at him.

"I care about you. I'd like to think we're something like friends, especially after last night. I'd rather not see you isolated, sinking into self-destructive habits."

Will frowned, making eye contact as Hannibal glanced down at him. He eventually nodded.

"I'll--I'll go call now."

"Good. Let me know what you schedule. I'd like to go into town myself, and I would happily drive you." Hannibal grinned from the doorway. "I know you prefer to be a passenger."

# forty three

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Hannibal being a shit
Will being a broken puppy

"This is ridiculous." Will sighed, rubbing his temples.

Hannibal leaned forward to glance at the institute from around Will. It was rather archaic, he had to admit. Stone walls and well kept-up exterior. He could tell by the strained light leaking through the lower windows that the hospital's interior was not shown the same level of care. He wouldn't presume to know how the staff treated their patients but he was quite certain they at least wanted to appear well meaning and state of the art. He wouldn't say anything to Will but that usually implied things inside were not as community friendly. Will was already nervous, Hannibal did not need him feeling less at home in his own skin.

"Would you like me to park and walk you in?" Hannibal said. He tried very hard to keep any kind of condescending tone from his words, but it was amusing and he couldn't hide that. He was making a genuine offer, but he was also attempting to break Will of his dark train of thought. The demon was prepared for any outcome. Will's soft snort made Hannibal smile.

"I can walk myself into my own appointment. You sound like Jack, with Alana's babying."

"Alana treads carefully because she's not sure what you can handle."

"I know." Will turned to look at Hannibal. "Don't do that."

"Do what?"

"Analyze my friends like that, like you know them." Will slowly placed his glasses low on his nose. He could feel Hannibal's disapproval, his slightly hurt feelings. Will glanced slowly at him, then away. "I'm sorry. I'm just..."

"You don't want to be here."

Will nodded.

"Just remember, you are here about killing the man that attacked you. Dr.Chilton is not diagnosing you with anything, testing you for anything. He is just getting out of you what he needs so that he can quiet Jack and Alana. At the very least, Will, you should know the right things to say to get your rubber stamp."

"I'm scared if I walk in there... they won't let me out." Will said quietly, a horrible little whisper. He was slightly surprised when Hannibal put a hand on his shoulder. He turned to glance at the demon through his thick lenses.

"If that happens I promise to burn them all to the ground to break you out."

"No need to be so... poetic." Will grumbled. "But I appreciate the thought. I'll--call you in about an hour, give or take."

"I'll be waiting. My errands won't take long."

"What kind of errands could a demon possibly have to run?"

"I thought I'd visit a cemetery, raise some spirits, perhaps make a confession or two. I hear there is a lovely church just down the road."

Will lifted his eyebrows and shook his head. He exited the car with little fanfare. Hannibal watched him slowly approach the hospital, wringing his hands, crossing his arms over his chest, wringing them again and finally settling for shoving them into his pockets. He ascended the steps to the tune of a funeral march, eyes down and head bowed.

Hannibal waited until the doors were firmly closed before pulling out his cell phone. As he pulled out of the circle he listened to the phone ring.

"Hello?"

"Alana. I hope I wasn't interrupting anything. I was wondering, would you perhaps like to meet me for a quick lunch?"

"Oh, Hannibal. Of course! I'm uh, relatively unoccupied this afternoon."

"Good. I don't want to take up much of your time but I do want to talk with you about something a little unpleasant."

"Is everything all right?"

"It's Will." Hannibal glanced at the hospital in the rear view mirror. "I'm starting to suspect he is more unstable than he is letting on. I'm worried about him." Hannibal knew the smirk on his face would not translate through the phone.

# forty four

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Talk of mental disorders
Talk of mental issues
All of the above talked about in rather harsh, non-accurate, perhaps even incorrect ways
Possible ableist language
A general disregard for the preferences and treatment of the mentally ill

(It's Chilton.)

"I have to say, Mr.Graham, before we get started, this is an honor. You know you're quite the topic of conversation in psychiatric circles."

Will frowned from the window. He turned slightly and glanced for a second at Doctor Frederick Chilton, smugly seated behind his desk. Will moved towards a chair.

"What is it you find so interesting?"

"Honestly, do you have to ask? This thing you do, getting into the heads of murder victims. Murderers It's fascinating. You present with signs of autism spectrum, social anxieties, personality disorders, disassociative episodes, etc, but you claim such a vivid imagination. Empathy, even! You'd fill books, that is, if you'd let anyone treat you."

"I don't get into the heads of murderers. Not anymore. A-and I don't need to be treated."

"Jack Crawford would beg to differ."

"Jack Crawford needs me on the force. He needs it on paper that I can be out there with him. I'm not here to be treated."

"And that is a shame." Chilton waved his hand graciously at the chair in front of his desk. He watched keenly as Will slowly sat down, sinking into the cushions and looking more like a boy than a grown man.

"So how does this work?" Will sighed heavily. He let his eyes wander over the outrageously framed certificates lining Chilton's wall.

"Well, Agent Crawford wants to make sure killing that lunatic didn't ruin you."

"Working here, doing what you do, can you /say/ lunatic?"

"I can say just about anything I want." Chilton smiled. "Lunatic might not be an official diagnosis, might not be one hundred percent PC but it gets the point across. You took a full psyche evaluation years ago to get onto the force," Chilton paused and eyed Will for a second, "sort of--and it wasn't my test. I'd like to see you take my test. However, that's not what you're here for. I'm just going to be conducting a personal interview."

Will nodded, glancing at Chilton briefly before looking away with a roll of his eyes. He waved dismissively and heard Chilton shuffling papers.

"Does mental illness run in your family, Will?"

"That's a good question. I ask myself that a lot."

"You mean you don't know?"

"Nope." Will hit his hands against the arm rests of the chair, rubbing his palms on the stiff fabric. "My father was a pariah in his family, only met his brother once. My mother's family wrote her off after she--right after I was born. So I have no idea."

"Disappointing. Some of these things can be biological, it would have really helped to know your--"

"You need to know all that to tell Jack I'm good to be back on the force?" Will met Chilton's eyes. The doctor frowned, pen pressed to his lips. He lifted his eyebrows and nodded, sighing and putting the pen down.

"Would you say you killed that man in self defense?"

"Yes."

"Interesting. Even though, by all accounts, the last two shots were unnecessary?"

"Unnecessary? Objectively I'm sure. In the heat of the moment? He--launched himself at me. I'm not going to count bullets; I'm not going to take stock of the damage I'm causing. I'm going to fire until he stops moving. Anyone in that situation would do the same."

"Would they?" Chilton tapped his pen on the desk. "How sure are you that you were... you in that moment, Mr.Graham?"

"Who else would I have been?"

"Why don't you tell me? You do that for a living, don't you? Assume the point of view of another person."

"I--find evidence." Will stood up. Chilton watched him.

"Evidence that no one else could have found. Evidence you only know is there because you can put yourself in the shoes of the people who were there."

"Over-active imagination." Will stated clearly, adjusting his glasses.

"Those aren't prescription." Chilton stated, glancing down at the file in front of him. "You use them as a barrier--except when you're working." Chilton smiled. "Jack stated here very clearly, multiple times, that you always take those off when you 'do your thing'. Are they a grounding tool, Mr.Graham? Are they keeping other people out or... are they keeping /you/ in?"

Will frowned hard. He turned to stare out the window. A few patients were wandering a closed in courtyard, most seemed happy enough. One young man sat in the far back corner, tucked tightly under a tree. Will could see his lips moving as he rocked back and forth.

"Do you remember pulling the trigger? Do you remember the moments leading up to it, the moments following?"

"Yes, yes and yes." Will turned and started back towards the chair. "I wasn't having an episode. I was myself. Clearly, myself."

"Are you able to recognize all your episodes so clearly?"

"For the most part."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning--I can't always tell when they're coming. I always realize once I'm... back, that I've had one. It's like recovering from a migraine. My whole body feels drawn thin."

"You lose time during these episodes?"

"For most of them. There have been a few that I can keep track, outside myself, like I'm watching a movie."

"Are you taking medication for these episodes?"

"Yes." Will paused, he rubbed the back of his neck. "No. Not anymore. I've been on so many medications. They all just eventually stop working. I'm--self medicating." Will glanced curiously, quickly at Chilton at this admission.

"Self medicating? With other drugs?"

"Alcohol. Not excessively, not in public. Just more than I should be drinking with medications."

"You do understand that's troubling, Mr.Graham?"

"Drinking is troubling?"

"For an FBI Agent it is."

"I'm not an FBI Agent."

"You're a special agent. A temporary badge holder, as Jack Crawford said. That puts you in a category of responsibility above that of the rest of us. You're under a great deal more scrutiny."

"Maybe but it doesn't mean I'm crazy."

"Ironically enough, you're not here for me to tell you that you're crazy. You're here for me to determine whether or not I think you can return to active duty." Chilton folded his hands under his chin and leaned forward onto his elbows. "I'm here to determine if you're stable."

"I feel stable."

"That's what they all say." Chilton moved to lean back. "Are you feeling any kind of heightened aggression? Has your temper gotten shorter since you pulled the trigger?"

Will shook his head, unkempt hair bouncing. Chilton nodded.

"Are you having trouble sleeping? Or having trouble staying asleep?"

"No more than usual. That's--part of the excuse for the whiskey. It helps me sleep."

"Do you hallucinate during these episodes?"

"Most of the time. I think you can kind of classify most of the episodes as hallucinations, in some form. I'm not me, even though physically I am. I see myself, outside myself."

"Have those hallucinations gotten worse since this incident?"

Will paused. He could feel the stag behind him, hooves sharp on the tile floor though it never lost it's footing. When had the stag first appeared? When had Will's depression--his snake--become this other creature? It was before he'd killed that man, wasn't it? Or...

"Mr.Graham?"

"No-no. They're the same."

"So you're not hallucinating--any more than usual. You're not experiencing insomnia--any more than usual. It doesn't seem like this caused you any undue stress, it just seems like you live in a world full of stress. This didn't make you unstable, you were already half way there."

"Is that your official report?" Will said in a whisper.

"No. My official report is that your mental state is unchanged as a result of this act of self defense. The official state of your mental health isn't mine to declare, though I will be recommending to Jack Crawford that you continue to see me--for therapeutic reasons--so that I might alert him if your mental state does change."

Will did not like the sick, sweet smile Dr.Chilton flashed him.

"It's only going to take me a moment to get those filed and sent off to Agent Crawford. We're all finished here... unless you would like a tour? Our facility is state of the art, all modern equipment and treatment courses. If you can't be out there, I say, this is one of the best places to be."

"No thank you." Will said shortly, rising and frowning at Chilton's offered hand. He shook it hesitantly.

"Until next time, Mr.Graham."

Will quickly exited the room. He avoided--and none too stealthily--looking at any of the nurses and orderlies as they walked past. He quickly stumbled down the stairs out front of the building and pulled his cell phone from his pocket. He dialed from memory and turned to look over his shoulder as the phone rang. He could see the hospital through the mist of his own breath, like looking at a reflection in the window.

"Hello?"

"It's done. Get here."

# forty five

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Discussion of mental health
Really bad French

"You know I have lived near Baltimore for years and I did not know this place existed." Alana said, shock evident on her voice and in her features as Hannibal pulled out her chair for her. She smiled a thank you and sat down, eyes scanning the hole-in-the wall gourmet cafe.

"I make it a point to know the best places to eat, where ever I go." Hannibal chuckled. "I am very particular about what I eat, and therefore do not routinely dine out. When I do I intend to enjoy the experience and I cannot do that if I'm questioning what I'm eating."

"That's practical." Alana chuckled, picking up the menu and letting her eyes wander.

Alana considered herself lucky she knew some of the dishes, the entire menu was in French. She took a second to glance over the top of the page at Hannibal. He seemed almost entirely removed from Will. Nothing about him seemed to match with her friend and she had trouble imagining what foundations their friendship was built on. She was not judging--far from it--she was simply curious. She knew that two people who had nothing in common could still be friends; Opposites attract was not strictly a romantic cliche. Her curiosity was just too piqued to ignore. Will was unwashed, rugged as the dogs he slept with, about as put together as his fly fishing boots and about as social as a feral cat. Hannibal was class, immaculate in everything, high society and the kind of man who thrilled at a night at the opera. What did they possibly talk about in the solitude of Will's tiny house?

Hannibal lifted an easy gaze over the menu and smiled at Alana. The waiter paused at their table and offered a small bow.

"Avons-nous fait nos décisions?"

Hannibal turned once more to Alana, giving her a look which quite clearly translated the man's question. Alana nodded and Hannibal waved her to order first.

"Ahh soupe à l’oignon, s'il vous plaît."

"Très bien. Et pour vous, monsieur?"

"Je vais commencer par la blanquette de veau, et un bourdeux rouge. Pour suivre Je pense qu'un paris brest. Je vous remercie."

"Bien sûr. Je vais mettre que pour vous."

"You speak French?" Alana asked incredulously, shaking her head.

"I do. It is one of eight languages I am fluent in." Hannibal admitted, though it was merely stating a fact. He did, however, offer a sly smile.

"I really shouldn't be surprised." Alana sighed.

"And why is that?"

"You just strike me as a well-traveled type. A man of high class, I suppose. It seems only fitting that you'd be able to speak--what was it?--eight languages?"

Hannibal laughed, and it caught Alana slightly off guard. He was nothing like the kind of men she usually found attractive--not that she was ready to admit that to herself just yet--but there was an incredibly attractive air around Hannibal. It was almost as if he was untouchable and yet so within reach. He was a higher class of person deeming it permissible to mingle with commoners but it was a soft, genuine kind of mingle. He /wanted/ to mingle even if he could not lower himself to such standards. He was comfortable on his pedestal but he did not want to seem arrogant. He did not change himself among 'lower' company, but rather adapted to them in a sincere way.

"I will agree to well traveled, but I'm afraid high class is a bit too pompous."

"I didn't mean to offend."

"No offense taken." Hannibal smiled again, though it was short lived as he looked apathetically around the room. He heard Alana sigh.

"If we can't even pretend to have a friendly conversation first then I'm just going to assume I won't like what you're about to tell me. At all."

"It's quite likely." Hannibal carefully folded the napkin on his place setting. "I have known Will longer than you, but you have known him most recently. You have seen him in far darker times than I. I wish to point out that I say this with only Will's best interest at heart, I do not mean to insinuate that you... could not see these things yourself. You are, after all, a finely accredited young woman. I do, however, offer an opinion and a set of eyes that are untrained, but knowledgeable about Will in ways you are not."

Alana frowned. Hannibal was very careful about the words that he chose. His voice became short and his eyes fell to the table. She felt her stomach warp and hoped she would still be able to enjoy her coming meal.

"Will is lapsing into deep disassociative states far more frequently than I fear he is admitting to you and Jack. The episode you witnessed in the grocery was not the first I have seen since my arrival, and it was certainly not the worst. He loses great gaps of time. He seems to be

present in the moment but then 'wakes up', comes back to himself, and has no memory of the past few moments, or even hours. I have found him sleepwalking. The police woke me at nearly three in the morning two weekends ago because they discovered Will--in a t-shirt and his boxers--walking down Bulls Neck Road. I have put off leaving, I have put off finding a more permanent housing situation for myself for fear of leaving Will alone." Hannibal frowned and folded his hands on the table. "I am very concerned about his mental state, Alana."

The demon watched as Alana took in his words, digested them and somehow managed to keep them down. He saw her purse her lips, lean back, nod slightly and look away. He could see tears threatening to gather in the corners of her eyes. She opened her mouth a few times for false starts before finding her voice.

"I didn't want to think about it." She admitted quietly. "You seemed so comfortable when he collapsed, like you'd done it before. I wanted to assume it was just because you knew Will, but one of the only things he's ever told me about his past is that he didn't start having these episodes until he was much older. Well after the two of you would have parted ways." Alana glanced softly to Hannibal. "How--how frequent are these episodes?"

"Oh, Alana," Hannibal turned his head away. "Three to five a week. Though if you ask Will himself, he claims there are few. His memory surrounding the episodes is as damaged as his memory during them. I--didn't come forward sooner for lack of desire to see Will tested, treated, put in a situation where these things are brought to light. I know he values his privacy."

"His safety comes before that, Hannibal." Alana said. She wanted there to be venom in her voice. She wanted to take all her worry about Will and bend it into anger at Hannibal for not coming forward sooner. She couldn't. She felt guilt worming through her veins and knew she was just as much to blame as Hannibal. She should have followed up more insistently after the collapse. She should have visited, insisted Jack visit more. Maybe they could have caught it before it got to this point. She glanced up as Hannibal reached over and touched her hand.

"I'm very sorry. I should have at least let you eat before giving you such a burden."

"No, it's--I would have been wondering the whole time what you were going to say. It's better to be direct." Alana offered what she hoped was a fairly strong smile. "Jack and I have almost weekly discussions about Will and his current state. Jack always insists he's fine, I always insist the opposite. I guess maybe I can try and find some pleasure in a good old fashioned 'I told you so.'" She shook her head. "I'm sorry. That was crude."

"Not at all," Hannibal shook his head, "it's not uncommon to look to means of relief in situations like this which are... otherwise inappropriate. Humor at a funeral, sarcasm in chaos. They are coping mechanisms."

"What was Will like before his life fell apart?"

"His life hasn't fallen apart, Alana." Hannibal said confidently. "Just because his mental health may be deteriorating does not mean his life is over."

"It feels that way."

"Why?"

"I--I feel like this has been a long time coming. It's like a train in the dark. I've been at the station for hours watching it's light break through the forest but I didn't do anything about it. It got brighter and brighter and now it's here and I... I'm guilty for being so surprised."

"You could not have predicted this. We don't even know what /this/ is, Alana. All I am telling you is that he is in need of more help than you might have previously assumed. He has reached a point where I fear he is no longer able to do things on his own. Matters are just going to get complicated, nothing is ending, no one is going anywhere."

"All right then, what was Will like before his life was so complicated?"

"A sad young man, living in sand castles and hoping for brick and mortar." Hannibal said sadly. "Will has never had stability in his life. I'm not sure he would know what to do with himself if he ever found it. He is used to living life teetering on the edge, just a breath away from falling." The demon glanced up and frowned at Alana's expression. "Not what you were expecting?"

"Not what I wanted to hear. I've always wanted to see him happy and it--I just didn't realize he's never really been happy, even when I thought he was."

"He's happy. He has been happy. He was happy with Jacob Hobbs." Hannibal said slowly, cautiously, watching Alana's expression. "They were very close. Will spoke of him quite often."

"If what you're saying is true, Will found some kind of stability in Hobbs. It's no wonder he couldn't right himself after everything. He hasn't fallen down, he never got up."

Hannibal gave a slow nod.

"We have the opportunity before us to get him on his feet, Alana. It won't be easy. The two of us, perhaps even Jack and Dr.Chilton, are going to seem like the enemy to Will. He is likely going to lash out at us, try and turn us against one another. We need to provide a unified front, discuss things and try to find out what would be best for Will and then we must not waiver from that path." Hannibal reached over once more and laid his hand atop Alana's. "No matter how hard he might beat against us."

"You're right." Alana nodded. "Dr.Chilton will be sending a copy of Will's paperwork to Jack this afternoon. I'll go see Jack after lunch, talk to him. The four of us can find a time to sit down and go over a few things, then we can decide what we're going to tell Will, and how."

Hannibal nodded. He squeezed Alana's hand gently and then pulled back as the waiter arrived with their meals.

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"You really have been all over the world." Alana said, eyes wide as she and Hannibal finished their deserts. "Honestly, and you know I love Will, I'm not sure how the two of you get along. You're polar opposites!"

"Will has his good qualities, buried under years of dog hair." Hannibal said jokingly. "He and I share a removed, intellectual view of the world. We may not enjoy the same things but we understand each other. I socialize much more frequently than Will but I will admit to feeling very alone around many people. Will helps me in that regard. I never feel alone with Will. He understands me when I feel that no one else in the world might." He paused. "Except, perhaps, you Alana."

The strange eye contact between them was broken as Hannibal's phone buzzed loudly from his pocket. He held up an apologetic finger to Alana and pulled it from his coat. He smiled at the name on the caller ID.

"Hello?"

"It's done. Get here."

# forty six

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Beverly Katz & Brian Zeller (who don't get enough love and it's a shame)

Brian Zeller frowned as he walked by the nearly empty cafeteria. Beverly sat alone in the far corner--which was not unusual by any means--but she had a coffee. That was unusual. She only drank coffee when she hadn't been able to sleep the previous night, or when she was trying to fight off thoughts she didn't want to be having. Then she not only drank coffee but she drank it blacker than Satan's asshole. Brian excused himself from the other agents he'd been walking with and turned to join her.

"You missed Jimmy cussing out the interns." Brian said cheerfully as he sat down across from Beverly. He watched as she slowly turned her eyes to him without moving her chin from her hand. "Called them some things I can't repeat, mostly because I'm not even sure what half of it meant. I swear one of them nearly pissed himself."

Beverly let out a soft chuckle and broke her gaze. She picked up her coffee and shook her head.

"And he wonders why he doesn't get a personal assistant."

"That's what I'm for." Brian grumbled. He nodded to the coffee and lifted an eyebrow. "Everything ok? Stupid question, I know. None of us could ever really be 'ok' with what we do, but... are you ok?"

"Yeah I guess so. I'm just running in circles in my own head and obviously not coming up with any answers."

"About what?"

"Abigail." Beverly said in a whisper, as if speaking the name would give her all the answers. "Jack's been consulting with her a lot recently, and he's not taking it so well. I think he's figuring something out." The dark haired woman glanced up at Brian and caught him looking away towards the door. He chewed on his lip and didn't answer. "You too, huh?"

"Yeah. Me and--Jimmy have talked about it." Brian rubbed at the back of his neck. "I /don't/ want to talk about it. He does. He's been singing in Jack's ear too; he's always been suspicious. Of everyone, not just of--you know. He doesn't like people. Turns on them far too quickly. And he really doesn't like things he can't explain so this is just like, thhk," Brian mimed pushing a button, "two of his big red buttons."

"What does he think?"

"Do you really want to know?" Brian frowned as Beverly looked up at him. There was a pause before she nodded twice, definitively. "He thinks Abigail knows more than she's letting on, way more. Now that Jack's been letting her play detective--Jimmy's words--he's starting to see things in her he recognized in her father. He says she's good at hiding things but almost too good. He doesn't like the jumps she takes."

"Will makes jumps."

"Yeah but Will is--Will is /Will/. He's out there like that. Abigail is just a normal girl. It's suspicious that she'd be able to do the same kinds of things that Will can do."

"Maybe he's rubbing off on her."

Brian tilted his head towards Beverly incredulously. She shrugged and looked away with a heavy sigh.

"I don't want to admit it either but maybe we should at least start considering it."

"Why now? Why would things just now be coming to light, Brian? If she was guilty in any way, wouldn't we have seen it before now?"

"The killing only started up again recently, Bev. There really wasn't anything to judge Abigail against until all this. She was just a traumatized young girl going through the motions of getting her life back. Now she's in a place where she might feel powerful, like she really can take her life back. If she knows more than... than we want to think she does, she could be using that knowledge to make herself useful around here. By controlling what she does and doesn't tell us, by manipulating what we can and can't figure out or-or solve, she's putting herself in a commanding role." Brian glanced down at Beverly's dark coffee. "Or she's just got a knack for this like Will and we're all a bunch of cynical old assholes."

"Hey. I'm not old. Not yet."

"I feel old."

"This job'll do that to you." Beverly chuckled. She jutted her chin forward with a smirk. "So, you and Jimmy huh?"

"You're worse at this than Jack." Brian whistled, shaking his head as his cheeks turned a darker shade under his stubble. "It's not like it's been any kind of secret for years now."

"Not like you confirmed it either."

"Yeah but we didn't deny it."

"Brian nobody /asked/!" Beverly laughed.

"Nobody asked because Jimmy's liable to chew off your face." Brian shook his head, grinning. "Well, yeah then. Me and Jimmy. I finished moving in with him last weekend."

"Would have helped, if you'd asked."

"Are you serious? Jimmy doesn't want anyone he works with anywhere near his personal life." Brian paused as Beverly looked at him incredulously. "I'm the exception."

"You've been Jimmy's exception to everything since that one really shitty house party Jack threw."

"You remember that?" Brian hissed.

"I don't want to, but I do. I think everyone does."

"Katz, Zeller, my office. Now."

Both agents jumped to their feet, hearts nearly stopped as Jack Crawford's booming voice interrupted their conversation. They turned just in time to see the man start down the hallway; his walk was purposeful and heavy. It would not be good news. The duo looked at one another and then quickly moved to follow Jack. Jimmy was clearly visible in the chair in front of Jack's desk as the duo turned the corner. They felt like students being called in by the Principal as Jack held open the door for them. They snuck in like dogs with their tails between their legs.

"This isn't a conversation I want to be having." Jack said darkly, his voice thick with accusation but not direction as everyone took a seat. Brian pulled a spare chair over from the corner. "But apparently it's a conversation other people are having, while I'm trying not to have it, so it needs to be had." Jack pressed his dark fingers into his temples. "Abigail Hobbs."

"What about her?" Beverly asked, the only one brave enough to try and poke at Jack.

"Everything about her. How far she's come since what happened and exactly what did happen. How she's coping. Where she's put herself. These... hunches she's been getting and the things she's been saying."

"Like giving you details about murder scenes that weren't released to the public?" Jimmy pressed.

"Could Will have told her? Or Alana?"

"Not likely. Alana knows better than to share any information with Abigail. Dr.Bloom has also been kept distant from these cases for a number of reasons. She wouldn't have the information to give Abigail. And Will... Will doesn't like to talk about work outside work. It takes pulling a tooth to get him to say anything about this stuff off the clock. I doubt he would have told Abigail anything in detail on his own."

"She's 'guessing' things she couldn't possibly guess." Jimmy shook his head. "She's not Will Graham but she thinks we'll treat her like she is. She's not getting her information the same way Will gets his."

"Jimmy we don't know how Will gets his information." Brian said quickly, splaying his hands in front of him. "Who are we to say she isn't like him?"

"Nobody is like Will, Z." Jack said confidently. "He's such a unique mix of--"

"Issues." Jimmy provided with a friendly smile.

"--that he can do things nobody else can explain. The evidence backs him up, always has and always will. Problem is Abigail doesn't have any of Will's talents. She's a smart kid but she's never seen these crime scenes. She's never seen full reports, it's all been just hear-say." Jack frowned, lines in his jaw pulled tight. He balled a hand into a fist and turned himself nearly profile.

"Jack?" Beverly pressed cautiously.

"The other day Abigail mentioned something about the Bible pages that were burned in the community center." Jack hesitantly lifted his gaze to the trio. "We kept that from the media. We kept that from a lot of people. Unless Will felt she needed to know--"

"Which is unlikely."

"--there is no way Abigail would have known about those pages unless she was there, or--"

"She had intimate knowledge of the crime or what kind of ritual was being performed."

Beverly and Brian exchanged slow, sidelong glances.

"What does this mean, Jack? What are we doing?" Brian frowned hard.

"We're... going to start treating Abigail Hobbs like a possible suspect. Low key, under the radar. I need to know if she knows more than we think she does or if she's another up-and-coming Will Graham. I need to know," Jack's voice seemed to catch in his throat, "I need to know if she helped her father commit his murders."

# forty seven

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Discussion of mental health
Discussion of a mentally ill person without their consent/knowledge

Alana paused outside Jack's office. She could just barely see him without pressing her face to the glass doors. He was seated at his desk, facing his monitor, but he wasn't looking at his monitor. Not really. His eyes were glassy and far away. Whatever Jack had on his mind was not reflected at him from the electronics on the desk. Alana dreaded what his own demons might be, knowing the one she had trailing her into the light. She opened the door gently and gave a quick knock to the glass.

"Jack? Do you have a second?" She said quietly, not wanting to break him out of his thought.

Jack glanced up quickly. He stood and eagerly waved Alana in. He was thankful to be brought out of his mind until he saw the expression--or lack thereof--on Alana's face as she took a seat.

"I'm not going to like this, am I?" Jack watched as Alana shook her head, bottom lip tucked tightly into her mouth. Jack sat and steepled his hands at his chin.

"It's Will, Jack." Alana said in barely a voice. "He's in trouble." She watched, frowning in deep lines as Jack closed his eyes slowly. "I saw Hannibal just a few hours ago. We had lunch and he told me things Will didn't--hasn't." When Jack simply looked at her Alana continued. "He's been having episodes, a lot more episodes than he's letting on. He's sleepwalking, he's losing time and his short term memory is falling apart. Hannibal says he doesn't remember episodes, forgets them entirely, even if he was lucid during the act itself. They're getting worse and Will is still unmedicated. Hannibal says he's still drinking, bordering on excessively."

Jack shook his head slowly, fishing around papers on his desk. He pulled out a hastily faxed copy of Chilton's report. He slid it across the table for Alana wordlessly. He watched her pick it up and read it, saw her knit her eyebrows in confusion.

"According to Dr.Chilton, Will is in fine mental health. And according to that report, he's cleared for duty in the wake of his attack. Nothing of note. Nothing to worry about." Even as Jack said the words he knew he didn't believe them. He wanted to--God damnit did he want to--but he couldn't. He needed Alana to vouch for the truth even though it was the last thing he needed.

"This clearly states 'based on my limited knowledge of Will Graham's normal state of mental health', Jack. If Chilton knew more he might not be so easily swayed to get Will back on the force. He practically says as much in between the lines. In fact he just about warns you that something is wrong, without coming out and saying it. He can't, technically, since he really doesn't know Will." Alana shook her head and slid the file away as if it were suddenly offensive. "He sees it. Hannibal sees it. Why didn't we? We claim to be his family, his closest friends. Why didn't we see this?"

"We did." Jack admitted like there was a noose around his neck. "We just pretended not to. We wanted so badly to be blind that we convinced ourselves we were. You know there's actually a scientific study that people in groups are less likely to call the authorities or an ambulance in times of crisis. They all assume someone else will do it. That's what we were doing; all of us. We could see it, we could see Will going down but we all thought someone else would do something about it. None of us wanted to admit it so we were waiting for someone else to make the call. We were watching Will bleed out and none of us had the courage to do a damned thing about it."

Alana reached up to press a finger underneath her eye, catching a tear and angrily smearing it away. Jack's words cut deep but only because she had been thinking the same thing. Jack's anger was directed at himself and his admission turned Alana's mind to loathing at her own being.

"I wonder," Jack continued in a slightly softer voice, "just how much we've fucked up Will Graham that it took someone who hasn't seen him for years to realize how bad he'd gotten. Hannibal couldn't have known what Will was like a year, two years, three years ago."

"We've had time to adapt to Will's changes. Hannibal hasn't. Hannibal remembered a Will none of us really knew, I'm sure the changes were color against a black and white backdrop for Hannibal. I'm surprised he talks to us at all, seeing what we've done to Will."

Silence again filled the room, thick and heavy. Jack leaned back in his chair as Alana uncrossed and then re-crossed her legs.

"What should we do?" Jack spoke, looking at the ceiling as if praying. "What can we do?"

"I think you and I, Hannibal and Chilton should talk. The four of us and go from there. We can't rely on my psychological analysis because it's tainted by my friendship with Will. I'm scared I won't be a reliable source of anything helpful. Dr.Chilton is relatively unbiased. He'll tell us what we need to hear whether we want to or not and between you, me and Hannibal we should be able to narrow down exactly what we feel is wrong, what's really abnormal. If we all agree it's dangerous... if we all agree Will needs drastic help..."

"He'll be institutionalized, Alana." Jack said, the words jarring even though they were on the tip of their tongues for hours. "He'll be locked up, for his own safety--maybe for the safety of others."

"I know." Alana looked down, almost as if she were bargaining. "We might ruin our friendship with him, irrevocably, but I'd rather step away from Will entirely than see him self destruct because I was too selfish to take that risk."

Jack nodded slowly as they met eyes.

"Set up something with Hannibal and Chilton. I don't care when, I don't care what time--I will make it happen. Make it soon."

"What about the investigation? I hate to stall this, but don't you need him? Shouldn't he be here to help?" Alana's words slowed. The look that flashed across Jack's face was dangerous and locked down with something like sorrow.

"We have Abigail." Jack growled, like a man finding his house burned down, his wife dead and his children slaughtered. "We have Abigail."

# forty eight

Chapter Summary

This chapter contains:

Manipulation

Abigail couldn't hear anything around her, not like she knew she should have. She could hear the earth trembling under her crossed legs, like the silence that followed lightning and predated thunder. It was a silent promise of power. She could hear the crackling of life leaving the broken sticks in front of her; popping like sore joints. She imagined the white lines of life webbing through the sticks, eating out from the green inside to the worn bark rough under her hands. She could hear the padding of paws on leaves in the distance, soft crunching and grinding, as Winston and Buster enjoyed their freedom.

She took in a slow breath through her mouth and let it out through her nose.

"Better?" Hannibal called from behind her.

"Better." Abigail said happily, turning to glance at him. He sat behind her in one of Will's more presentable lawn chairs. He'd removed a dark purple vest and gray jacket earlier to settle for a simple gray button-up and slacks. His tie was a dark paisley pattern that looked black until closer inspection. His legs were crossed, his hands resting on top of his knee as he nodded proudly.

"I could see a change, that time." He said confidently as Abigail stood. "Did you feel a change?"

"Yes? I mean, yes but not what I was expecting. I took myself /out/ of myself, like you said. I could hear things around me but they weren't the normal things like the wind and that song you were humming." Abigail paused as she stepped towards Hannibal. "I could hear the ground, and those sticks we broke, and the dogs." She turned and scanned the wooded land for the dogs. She could not see them, but trusted that they wouldn't go far.

"Very good." Hannibal smiled. "It's a pity your father wasn't able to do things correctly for you, Abigail."

"He wasn't doing anything for me." Abigail said slowly, voice low. "He didn't know what he was doing. He was scared and desperate. He didn't know any of this and by the time it mattered he wouldn't listen to me."

"He mistook you for the sign he was waiting for?"

"Yes. He--he started to think I was the reason his summons hadn't worked before. He started thinking the failures were due to the sacrifices, and not that he was doing it wrong."

"He thought that because you knew so much, that you would be the ideal sacrifice?" Hannibal tilted his head to the side slowly as Abigail nodded, crossing her arms over her chest and rubbing them as if cold. He sighed heavily and moved to stand. He moved and put both hands on Abigail's upper arms, smiling down at her.

"We should at least ensure that all your studying does not go to waste, even if we cannot make your father see the horrible mistake he nearly committed."

"If it had worked, what he was trying to do, would it have summoned you?" Abigail asked as Hannibal moved away.

"No." Hannibal was almost cheerful.

"But it was the same circle--they've all been the same circle. The book you showed me, the one you got to Will through the vessel, it's the same circle." Abigail moved to catch up with Hannibal as he started into the woods, presumably to find Winston and Buster.

"It is and it isn't. There are levels of demons, a hierarchy if you will. A single circle can summon a demon of any position in the hierarchy, it's all based upon the power of the summoner. Your father could never have summoned me, Abigail." Hannibal turned and gave the girl a smug look. "He could never have controlled me, never have collared or shackled me. Anything that would have come through for your father would have been far lesser."

"You could have come through, though, if you wanted."

"I could have. I could have turned him into a vessel, but he sunk his own ship Abigail. He was in far too deep to be of any use to anyone. What demon in their right mind would want a vessel locked in prison?" Hannibal chuckled. "We do have limits."

"And what about the other circles? The ones Will and the FBI are looking into?"

"Hmm, they vary. There is one woman among them who could call someone of my power through, if only she would wise up and learn from her mistakes. The rest are all doomed to fail."

"Why... what is it about Will that made him powerful enough to pull you through?" Abigail asked hesitantly, stopping. She watched Hannibal stop a few paces ahead of her, his hands slowly tucking into his pants pocket.

"He has... intimate knowledge of us and our realm, even if he does not realize it. This thing that he does it permits him a glimpse behind the veil. He has a great deal of power and potential, Abigail," Hannibal turned over his shoulder, a dark look in his eyes, "and I intend to help him bring that power to light."

"How?" Abigail's eyelids fluttered as Hannibal laughed and turned to her. He shook his head.

"All I can tell you is that I have everything in hand. All you have to do is play along. It won't make sense at first, it won't make sense for a long time, but trust me. My goal is now and will always be to bring Will to his full potential."

Abigail nodded slowly as she met Hannibal's eyes. She could see the air around his face warping and wilting in the heat pouring from his eyes. All around him the air quivered as if frightened to touch him, even the breeze averted it's touch.

"He views you like a surrogate daughter." Hannibal continued, watching Winston and Buster running towards them from a far hill.

"No." Abigail shook her head as she joined him at his side once more. "He sees me as a way to reach my father again. He... tries too hard but he doesn't, I don't know, he doesn't understand what he's feeling I guess. He wants to be a surrogate for me but he doesn't know how to do that. He doesn't know what it's like to have a father so he doesn't really know how to be one. From what he's told me of his dad--which is next to nothing--it was more like living with an older room mate than family. He's awkward around me because he plays out TV family tropes. It's ok sometimes, when I feel like I need to be normal like /really/ normal but none of us are really normal any more. I can only take his doting for so long." Abigail chewed on her bottom lip for a second. "I feel guilty saying that. I owe him so much. Even before my father die--was murdered, I owed him. I just can't be what he needs me to be and he can't be what I need him to be even though we both kind of pretend we are and we can."

"That sounds very tiring."

Abigail nodded with a slight laugh. She bent down and ruffled her fingers through Winston's fur as the dogs obediently joined their temporary care takers.

"It is. It's not as bad with Jack, though Bella is still really strained. Alana's the easiest, but I do feel like she's psychoanalyzing me all the time."

"There's no guarantee she's not." Hannibal lifted an eyebrow.

"I know. She keeps long, detailed journals. I've seen her writing in them at night. I'm pretty sure at least two of them are full of stuff about me. I don't really mind it though. She's the only one who treats me genuinely. She's not trying to be my mother or father or anything other than a friend. She's a mentor when I need it, a room mate when I need it and sometimes even a therapist. Like I said, it's easiest with her."

The duo fell into silence as they approached the back of Will's house. Buster and Winston danced around between them, barking off and on when something caught their attention.

"It's easy with you." Abigail said after a second, stepping out of the wooded area. She heard Hannibal chuckle lightly.

"Of course it is. I'm a little bit of your father which is comforting and familiar. I'm a little bit if Will which is welcoming and warm. I'm a little bit of what you tasted during your research which is gratifying and empowering." Hannibal tilted his head. "We could do great things together, you, Will and I." He watched as Abigail smiled forward, not turning to look at him.

Both stopped and glanced up as a car sounded far on the driveway. They looked as alert as Buster and Winston, who paused and then took off barking.

"Will's home." Abigail whispered. She glanced over as Hannibal gently grabbed her upper arm.

"This will be difficult, but I need you to follow my lead, Abigail." He turned to look at her. "You trust that I have Will's best interests in mind?"

"Yes."

"And you'll do as I say?"

"Yes."

"Good." Hannibal gently smoothed down her sleeve and stalked forward. Abigail took a second to breathe in and out slowly, calming herself and steeling her mind for whatever Hannibal was going to ask her to do. She found trusting him far easier than trusting anyone else. Comforting, familiar, welcoming, warm, gratifying an empowering. She nodded to herself and jogged to catch up with Hannibal as he waited for the car.

"Surprised to see you here, Abigail." Will said, smiling tiredly as he stepped out of the car. He immediately bent to greet his dogs.

"You are?" Hannibal said quickly, looking worriedly from Will to Abigail and back.

"Shouldn't I be?" Will chuckled, standing. His good nature was immediately swallowed by something like fear as he glanced between the other two. Abigail frowned and looked away, chewing on her lip. Hannibal sighed and glanced to the ground, one hand in his pocket the other rubbing momentarily against his thigh.

"She was invited." Hannibal said quietly. "We're supposed to have dinner, the three of us." Will knitted his eyebrows together as the demon glanced up at him. "Like we've done every week for about six months now."

Will blinked as he stood up straight, looking between them. Abigail couldn't meet his gaze, worry lines across her face and in the gnawing of her lips. Hannibal was staring straight at him, a vast contrast to Abigail. The demon seemed to be staring at Will, looking for something physical to explain the lapse in memory. Will heard a bell go off in the back of his mind, warring between the horrifying idea that he had forgotten such a thing and the suspicion that Hannibal was playing some kind of game. He didn't like either outcome, especially when they both gripped at his gut like a knife. He rubbed the back of his neck, ran a hand down his face and turned around. He turned back and met Hannibal's gaze and then put his back to the demon. He turned and started towards the house.

"Will!" Abigail chirped, moving to follow him. As she moved past Hannibal she gave him a look and the demon nodded almost invisibly.

"Will, wait."

"Is that true?" Will sneered, turning around and pointing to Hannibal. "Is that true?"

"Y-yes." Abigail said, nodding worriedly. She watched as Will pushed his hands into his curls and breathed out heavily, his chest seeming to cave in on itself. She hated seeing him so painfully torn between bad ideas but she trusted Hannibal. The ends would justify the means.

"I don't remember." Will whispered after a broken second. "I don't remember inviting you. I don't remember the dinners. I don't--I don't remember any of it."

"Are you still not taking your medication?" Will shook his head once, a very definitive motion, one Abigail recognized as a conscious effort to provide the right social cue. She glanced over her shoulder as Hannibal joined them.

"Perhaps we should stay in tonight." Hannibal looked from Abigail to Will. "I can cook us something. It might be for the best." He added, smiling at Will softly. He watched as Will turned to look at him and nodded a little more reactively. He saw the narrowing of Will's eyes, the tensing in the man's jaw as Hannibal's words from just a few seconds took hold and pushed Will into one corner firmly.

Hannibal had not been around for six months. The demon smirked. He would let the words settle with Will throughout dinner, watch them boil and rot in his stomach until Abigail was gone. Will would not dare bring it up in front of her, after all no one yet knew Abigail's secret and Will would certainly not be the one to expose her to Hannibal's true nature. The demon wanted the truth to dig in and seed in Will. The more he believed it the more passionately he would defend it later when everyone else was against him, when everyone else saw him as a paranoid, unmedicated man spiraling out of control. Then only he and Hannibal would know the truth.

# forty nine

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Manipulation
Anxiety attack
Near disassociative episodes
Painful confusion
Self harm
Nudity

Will stared at Hannibal's back as he watched Abigail from the doorway. Apparently he was very concerned with making sure she got to her cab safely. Will's eyes buried themselves into the back of the demon's skull as he casually lifted his hand and waved at the young girl. Will's stare did not break as Hannibal comfortably closed the door and turned around, a smile on his face. The smile did not break as he met Will's eyes.

"Are you feeling all right?" Hannibal started, voice smooth. "You barely touched your meal."

"I don't have the words to express what's going through my mind right now." Will hissed, voice low and rough like gravel. "I don't know what you're doing to Abigail, but you /will/ stop." It was a command and Will watched Hannibal's face twitch slightly at the words.

"I'm not doing anything to Abigail." Hannibal responded, emphasizing the 'to'. He smiled again at Will. "I'm not intending to harm her, if that's what you're thinking. The young lady simply needed a friend, someone she could talk to."

"She doesn't know what you are! You're using her! Manipulating her and you're bringing me into it!" Will started forward, eyes burning and cheeks flushed from a sudden surge of anger. "How did you get her to play along with your lies? Are you black mailing her with something? Are you messing with her head? Did you..." Will's face drained of color; he started to look ill. "Did you tell her what you are? Show her?"

"Now, Will, think about what you're saying. What could I possibly have told Abigail?" Hannibal tilted his head to watch Will look away.

He could see the thinking in Will's mind and it made him swallow a smile. It was good. Will knew that if Hannibal had told Abigail anything it would implicate Will in Hannibal's summoning. If Hannibal told Abigail he was a demon, she would be on to Will. She didn't seem to act differently about Will, didn't seem scared of him and she hadn't called the cops.

But she was lying with Hannibal. She was agreeing with Hannibal. He had to have told her something! That was exactly what Hannibal wanted Will to think.

"You haven't... been here for six months." Will tried desperately to still sound angry, but something about his train of thought left him more tired than anything. Even the warning bells in the back of his mind--the ones that screamed that Hannibal was a demon, that this bellowed betrayal and bad ideas and nothing but evil--were quiet and a dim suggestion at best.

"I know." Hannibal said with a sigh, moving a little closer to Will. "I would have come sooner, had I known how much you needed my help." He watched as Will looked up at him, brows knitted together in confusion.

"What?"

"You've needed me for quite some time, Will, and I have not been there for you." Hannibal reached out and gently cupped Will's face in his hand. He watched blue eyes fret wildly about his face, trying to figure out what kind of code the demon was talking in. Hannibal kept his expression soft, compassionate.

"Why would I need you?" Will whispered, though he did not move to shake Hannibal's hand from his face. His head began to throb, a dull ache behind his ears that moved steadily upwards.

"You're lost out here, all alone. Jack Crawford is pushing you too hard and you're giving in too much. You've needed someone to help guide you. I'm sorry I wasn't here sooner."

"But... how? I mean..." Will shook his head and batted away Hannibal's hand. He turned away. "You talk like you've known me for years. That's impossible. I--I /summoned/ you less than four months ago."

"I know." Hannibal watched Will, knitting his brows together. "But it shouldn't have come to that, Will. I should have realized how much you needed me before that. I shouldn't have let it go this long unchecked."

Hannibal craned his head towards Will slightly as the FBI agent turned to look at him. The demon drank in the expression on the other man's face. Wild blue eyes were panicked with fear and confusion. Will was certain he knew what he knew but... what did he know? The demon glanced down to Will's throat as the man looked away. He knew that Will still had not fully accepted what Hannibal was--though he'd come close--and it was still a point of great debate in his mind. He knew the other man couldn't fully swallow the idea that demons were real and his whole life had been a lie. And here Hannibal was, offering Will a vague shadow that none of it was real, that it had all been a bad dream and Will could go back to believing what he wanted about how the world worked. But what would that mean? That meant Will had dreamed so much, made up so much, forgotten so much. Had he really lost his mind? Had he really spiraled so far he could forget something so real? How much of his memory could he trust?

Hannibal reached out and gripped Will's left shoulder tightly.

"It's all right, Will. You need to relax. I think a nice warm bath is in order."

Will nodded slowly, feeling his head spin. He found himself wishing for an episode. He found himself hoping he would just step outside his own body and let it do whatever it wanted for a while. He wanted to re-organize and re-think and figure out where he was and what was going on. Part of him screamed so loudly that this was all a big mistake, that he was completely over looking the reality of the situation and that Hannibal was playing him like an instrument. An equally as loud part of him howled that demons weren't real! None of this had been real! Will was in his thirties, humanity had existed long before that, if demons were real where was the evidence? Surely it would be public knowledge by now! It wasn't. It wasn't it wasn't it wasn't it wasn't it wasn't...

Hannibal slowly turned and guided Will upstairs. The man's steps were shallow but conscious, meaning Will had gone inside but he had not disassociated. That was fine by Hannibal. In fact the longer he could keep Will within himself and confused the better. He did feel a slight pang of regret as he gripped Will's bicep and pushed him up the stairs. His summoner had such untapped potential, he was so interesting, Hannibal was remiss to be doing what he was doing. He had to, he knew, he had no other choice. It would all work out in the end. It would all be worth it soon enough. Will would see that some day. Will would realize the whole truth and then he would ascend with Hannibal into something greater than the two of them alone.

Will wanted to feel like a zombie as Hannibal moved to sit him on the closed lid of the toilet. He was far too aware of himself, far too aware of the tar pit of confusion he was sinking in to. He did consider himself fairly lucky that in his mind's eye he could see Hannibal slowly pushing his head under the sucking pitch, forcing his throat to clench and his lungs to burn. The stag stood on the other end of the pit, ears perked forward. It seemed to Will to be considering deeply the situation though not sure what it felt it should be doing. Did it have the capacity to save Will? Should it save him? Or was it on Hannibal's side? Had it been in league with the demon the whole time?

Hannibal glanced over his shoulder as he tested the temperature of the water. Will's eyes were glassy but he was still there, still holding on. Hannibal considered it a beautiful example of humanities' destructive qualities that the one time where Will would have benefited from a disassociative episode that he was entirely unable to trigger one. Hannibal plugged up the drain and turned to Will, crouching in front of him. He turned his head until lazy eye contact was made and lifted his eyebrows.

"Let's get you undressed." He said, watching as Will gave the slightest of nods.

Will let himself be bodily manipulated as the demon spoke soft, comforting words. Hannibal was like a deep embrace during a crisis--he was exactly what Will needed even if his body felt repulsed at the act of physical contact. Will ruminated on how warm Hannibal's hands were as they gently pried off his jacket. He became wrapped up in how long and agile Hannibal's fingers were as they worked open each and every button of Will's shirt. He swallowed eagerly how tender Hannibal's touches against his skin were as his shirt was split down the center and tugged off. He felt Hannibal's thumbs run lines down his wrists as the

sleeves were pulled free and Will looked down. There should have been a scar across his wrist from where he'd cut himself summoning Hannibal--yet there was not.

Hannibal watched as Will's eyes moved to his wrist, searching for a scar that was not there. The reasonable explanation--of course--was that Hannibal had healed the scar, however Will was likely to forget that in his current state of mind. His brain searching for ways to comfort him and alleviate stress would simply suggest that perhaps the scar was not there because there had never been an injury. Hannibal turned his attention to Will's feet, holding his ankles as he pulled off shoes and socks, setting them to the side. He glanced back up to see Will looking down at him.

"What are you?" Will whispered in a soft voice that almost broke with the threat of tears.

"Someone who cares about your well being, Will." Hannibal answered sincerely. His hands moved to Will's pants, his belt.

Will leaned back into the cold bite of the toilet as Hannibal began removing his pants. He was neither reviled by the act or aroused, he was apathetic in the purest sense of the word. Hannibal had suggested a bath, nothing inherently sexual about that, and Will's body was too tired to make it more than it was. It was far too comfortable with Hannibal being so close, casual and intimate. Will almost would have preferred the betrayal of arousal. He could have blamed it on the fear and adrenaline brought on by having a stranger so close to his genitals, but he didn't even have that. His body was so comforted by Hannibal's presence that they could be so bare with one another and sexual acts were not on the table. Hannibal was simply helping Will into the bathtub, an act reserved for parents and children and caretakers to patients and the most secure of married couples. Anything in between was sexual or at least remotely bordering on the sexual. No, this was an act of compassion removed from lust.

Will's eyes slipped closed as Hannibal gently urged him to stand. The demon pulled him to rest against his chest as he slipped the pants down, waiting until Will was steady enough on his feet to kneel and pull them the rest of the way off. Hannibal glanced up as Will placed a hand on either of Hannibal's shoulders to help maintain balance as he lifted one foot and then the other. As the demon stood Will seemed to register that he was fully nude and crossed his arms tightly over his chest. Hannibal could see a shiver in the corner of the man's mouth. He indicated the tub and let Will brace against him as he stepped in.

Will slipped into the warm water gratefully, letting his eyes close. He sunk down until the water drenched him up to his chin, tipping his head back against the rear of the tub. It tried to soothe sore muscles, old aches and new tension but as soon as knots were worked out they were replaced by some new anxiety. Will opened his eyes, half-lidded, and turned his head as he heard Hannibal milling about just on the other side of the tub. The other man was dutifully picking up Will's discarded clothes, folding them and setting them aside nicely. Will felt his body slowly giving in to the warm water as Hannibal rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and turn to the tub.

"Does that help?" Hannibal asked, watching Will watching him. The water rippled as Will nodded and Hannibal smiled. "Good."

He tilted his head to one side as Will met eyes and slowly let himself slip under the water. Hannibal lifted his eyebrows as he watched thick, bouncy hair drink like a parched creature. He watched bubbles rise from Will's nose, counted them until he was almost ready to move forward, and let out a soft breath as Will slowly broke the surface of the water. Hannibal's maroon eyes drifted down as water curled into Will's lips as they parted, dripped off his eyelashes as eyes slowly opened to stare blankly ahead. Water ran down Will's temples, his forehead, his neck, everything as curls gave up what they could not hold on to.

Will reclined once more back against the tub and felt his eyelids grow heavy. They opened lazily as Hannibal moved to the cabinet under the sink. Will did not move to see what the demon was doing, instead he listened as he rummaged through various things before returning to Will's line of sight. In his hands he held a bottle of shampoo. Will knitted his brows together in confusion--he didn't buy shampoo... It must have been Hannibal's.

"May I?" Hannibal asked, indicating the bottle and moving closer.

"You want... to wash my hair?" Will whispered, chin dipping below the water as he spoke.

"Yes."

"How very Biblical of you." Will agreed with a nod, sitting up just enough to give Hannibal room to work.

"Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, not their hair." Hannibal said with a laugh on his tongue. "Shall I wash your feet, Will?"

"I don't feel that would be entirely appropriate."

"Then just your hair. It's about time you did so correctly. Bar soap is not intended for your hair."

Hannibal dipped his hands into the water on either side of Will's head, letting his fingers brush barely against the man's throat. He cupped them against Will's flesh and pulled them up to gather his hair, pull it back into one manageable lot. He poured an ample amount of shampoo into his hands and rubbed them together over Will's hair. Watching the man take in a deep, slow breath beneath the water Hannibal set to work. He stretched long fingers into dark, wet curls. He let the pads of his fingers brush against Will's scalp, taking care not to pull through tangles or tough locks. He pressed his thumbs to the back of Will's head, covering most of it with his scalp until he worked his thumbs down and behind Will's ears. He heard the other man groan softly as he pressed into the area behind Will's ears, working through a tension headache.

Will quickly lost the battle to stay alert and aware as Hannibal's hands rubbed behind his ears. Dexterous fingers moved through his hair and it was a sensation unlike anything Will had ever experienced. No one had ever touched his hair before--not even a barber; he'd learned years ago to do that himself. His father had trimmed his hair as a boy and when he was old enough to afford a stylist his fear about making small talk had prevented him from keeping any appointments. Now Hannibal knelt behind him, drawing long fingers through his wet hair and all Will could think was that the demon was stroking his very soul through the top of

his head. Soft pads of fingers were replaced once or twice by short nails scraping just barely against his scalp. Will felt a warmth fall over him that was entirely removed from the water. It was something like arousal but once more removed from any sexual appetite.

It just /felt good/.

Hannibal massaged his hands against Will's head, gently urging hair clean, rubbing and petting far longer than he knew was necessary. He could feel Will's breathing slow, becoming deep and regulated as the man threatened to fall asleep on Hannibal's watch. The demon gently brushed a knuckle over Will's right temple.

"You cannot fall asleep here, Will."

"You... won't let me drown." Will whispered, voice thick and heavy as he refused to open his eyes.

"No." Hannibal said, rubbing his thumb tenderly against Will's skin. "I won't."

# fifty

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Blood
Gore
Death
Murder
Hallucinations
(you know, all the good things)

"Oh I am really starting to miss the good old fashioned days of homicide." Jimmy Price groaned, taking a moment to wipe the sweat off his brow with the back of his wrist. "Some of that good ol' killing folks just 'cause you like killin' 'em." He shook his head. "This ritual satanic bullshit is really getting stale."

Brian snorted derisively but felt himself nodding in agreement. He sat back down on his haunches and sighed as he stared up at their most recent crime scene. He shuddered.

A man in his late thirties hung nude from a cross. Strong rope was tied around his neck, behind the crucifix, under his arms and then back behind the post to hold him in place. Another rope was pulled on either side of his dick in the crook of his hips and held his pelvis to the crucifix as well. It was a good thing they were strong anchors--Brian thought bitterly--because with the man's spine completely removed from his body there was very little else holding him together. The spine had been curled into a large circle and hung from the man's neck like a large golden chain. His ribs had been broken and spread. Various organs and flaps of flesh were pierced by shards of rib and then stuck into the spine-necklace. Thirteen shards, to be exact, creating a summoning circle from the man's own flesh and blood.

"It just seems so dramatic." Beverly grumbled, hands on her hips as she stood behind the crucifix. "Not so much trying a different approach when the others failed, but mocking those who tried in the first place. As if this person knew this wasn't going to work, they were just... making art."

"Inferring the other killers thought their circles /would/ work?" Brian questioned.

"They did. They do. It's what Will's been saying since day one." Jimmy shook his head.

"This one is different." Will called from the back pew of the church. Jack Crawford turned to look at him, standing far closer to the crucifix than he wanted to be. Will slowly stood and moved up to stand next to Jack.

"This /is/ art, it's not practical but it was never meant to be. The circle is--it's imperfect, the points aren't right. It's imitation."

"The highest form of flattery." Jack provided, watching Will move forward yet again.

"This killer isn't trying to summon anything. This killer isn't trying to bring across fledgling believers; they aren't trying to make a statement or prove to Satan they're worthy."

"What are they doing, Will?" Jack said, looking at the ground. He felt Will stepping forward again and out into the wild. He felt the other man shedding the protective coat Jack offered and giving himself to the wild. He was once more connecting with killers and now it appeared he was not even going to hide it.

"They're talking to someone." Will tilted his head to one side. "Or at least they're trying to. It's like making a phone call or taking out a personal add. They've got a very specific contact in mind..." Will turned to look at Jack.

"Our hacker."

"Our hacker." Will said with a smile, nodding.

Jack reached up and rubbed his temples, watching Will move to lean against a column nearby. Alana, Chilton and Hannibal had very busy schedules it seemed. Alana was a working psychiatrist and didn't want to inconvenience her patients any more than she had to. Chilton, obviously, had an institution to run. And Hannibal was busy giving lectures as a guest speaker nearby and--according to Alana--searching for a more permanent residence. It had struck Jack as odd that he'd been living with Will for almost six months, but he hadn't said anything. Everyone insisted that it was just supposed to be temporary, but with the impending decision about Will's mental health on the horizon, Jack knew temporary was not in the question.

In the meantime Jack busied himself trying to keep track of Will's mental state. It was an unnerving task he'd set himself too and he found for the first time in years he'd actually been keen to take up a journal. It made things easier to remember and also harder to look at. Will was two people now, or at least that was how it seemed. One moment he was vulnerable, shaking, sweating too much and cracking under pressure like a man in custody. The next he was cool, confident, almost dark and sharp like he knew he was supposed to be exactly where he was. There was very, very little room between the two 'Wills'. He was one or he was the other and it happened like lightning. Jack wanted to relax in the presence of the calm Will, but needed to see more of the desperate one.

Jack shook his head and glanced to Jimmy.

"Okay everyone, Will's turn." He declared, waving the investigators out. He spared a last, passing glance at Will as he followed them. Confident Will appeared to have swallowed desperate Will for the time being. Jack could not even bring himself to be glad this would likely mean a quick arrest.

Will rolled his head on his shoulders as he moved to stand in front of the crucifix. His vision blurred for a second, his head became light and he squeezed a fist so hard his nails bit into his palm to remind him of where he was, who he was. The slight pain brought his thoughts back into focus and he closed his eyes.

Opening them he saw the crucifix become bare, broken down into two seemingly meaningless boards. The muffled sounds of a man gagged and bound turned his head downwards. He was met with fearful eyes and he smiled softly. He knelt down and reached out a hand to stroke the man's cheek. His touch was delicate and the man was terrified. He turned and spied a large, fully packed duffle bag not far from where he crouched. He reached in and pulled out a full syringe.

'He knew this church. He knew when he wouldn't be noticed, he knew when the doors would be locked and who to talk to in order to get them opened. He bargained for his way in and made a new friend, or an enemy in waiting. No, not he. She. She knew.'

Will moved back towards the man and rolled him to his side. He spent a few moments looking at bare skin in a strange kind of curiosity. This was new territory in a way that reading about something does not prepare you for the act. He prepared the needle and let it hover near the man's hip, his buttock for a good while before finally sucking in a deep breath and plunging the needle as far as he could. He depressed it quickly and pulled it out, knowing if he gave it any more thought he'd be too scared to continue.

'She is not an experienced murderer but she is familiar with it, somehow. She was guided here, made to perform the act herself but not in control though she was here alone. She... had help securing the victim, capturing him, but the killing was done on her own, that's why she had to sedate him. She couldn't risk a fight because she knew she could not overpower him.'

Will's eyes drifted back to the bag as the man's struggling became quieter and quieter. There were all manner of tools stashed in there, everything a small woman would need to do what she had done and yet... it seemed impossible for her to have completed the task alone. She had to have help in some way.

Will was roughly pulled away from his imaginings and to himself with a powerful throbbing headache. It made him stumble backwards and groan out loud. His mind provided him with a very vivid idea of what could have helped this young woman do what she'd done without providing her with an accomplice. A dark figure made of smoke and ash, taller than any human, with four arms, glowing red eyes and antlers. As Will hesitantly opened his eyes he saw the stag--whom he had not seen in weeks--standing on the dais behind the crucifix. Desperate Will rose to the surface as the stag charged forward and pressed it's antlers into the back of the scene. It pushed and snorted and heaved and the crucifix was toppled. Will barely managed to step back as everything came crumbling down. The man made impact on the floor and erupted into a sea of blood that swelled up around Will's knees.

"Will?" Jack said quietly, standing behind the other man, watching shoulders quake with a pained sense of relief.

"You're looking for a woman, Jack. Short, small, petite in every sense of the word. Young. She's never done this before but she wasn't really acting on her own, even though there was

no one else here, physically with her. She knew how to do this but she'd never actually done it before."

"Will, are you honestly trying to tell me a petite woman did this? I'm not sexist by any stretch but Will this man had to weigh over 180lbs. He's big. And I have trouble imagining the man that could pull his spine free like this, let alone a small, petite woman."

"She had... tools at her disposal." Will's mouth fit around the word 'tools' like an animal, snarling and curling his lip as his tongue gently caressed the back of his teeth. He turned his head to meet Jack's eyes sidelong.

"All right then. A woman." Jack sighed.

Will turned and strode quickly from the church, nearly bumping into Beverly on his way out. The two met eyes just long enough for Beverly to register a strange grimace on Will's face before he moved through her line of sight. Ahead of her Jack turned and lowered his voice.

"I want Abigail to see these pictures. I want her to assist in the morgue."

# fifty one

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Blood
Gore
Death

"And you're sure this is ok?" Abigail asked, stuck somewhere between excitement and fear. She watched Jack nod.

"I'm kind of in charge around here, remember?" Jack joked. "Plus it'll look good on all your academic reports."

Abigail nodded in agreement. Her stomach was sour but her head buzzed. She had never felt two conflicting emotions so powerfully warring for her attention. She was finally being treated like an adult, respected like one. She was being permitted into the FBI's most inner workings. She was consulting on a case, more or less. Jack Crawford was interested in what she had to say about it. On the other hand...

It was /her/ murder.

She and Hannibal had talked at length about this moment. He had warned her that Jack was starting to suspect--he'd had dinners with Jack and he knew--he told her what to do and what not to do. But it wasn't scripted. Abigail would have to improvise as situations arose and at any second she was liable to slip up and give herself away. She knew that she could never fall back on the truth to save herself--that she had bargained for the strength of a demon with a man's life--but that she would be condemned by her actions as if she had acted alone. If she decided to try and tell the truth it would only make things worse for her. Hannibal had helped get her into this situation but she was now standing there alone. And yet she could not hate him, in fact it almost made her love him in some sense. He was helping her but not giving her a crutch. He was giving her the tools she needed to stand on her own, and then trusting her to do so. He had helped her climb the mountain but she reached the summit alone.

She offered Jack what she hoped was an excited smile as he held open a door and ushered her inside. She held her breath.

Jimmy Price, Beverly Katz, Brian Zeller and Will Graham were gathered in a corner around a slab, talking and gesturing to the dead man among them. As they approached all eyes were on Abigail--and only Will seemed surprised.

"I... wasn't aware we were giving tours, Jack." Will said, his voice clipped with anger.

"This is a special occasion. I've been talking to the men above me--which there aren't many--and have gotten permission to have Abigail trail us for this case. She's kept up her grades and impressed a number of important people. With any luck we're just preparing her for her eventual life style choice."

Brian snorted back laughter and wilted almost immediately under Jimmy's quick look. He cleared his throat and met Beverly's smirk with a shrug. Jack put both his hands on Abigail's shoulders and steered her closer. Will watched as her eyes darted over the body, exposed and relatively unchanged from its position upon the cross. They had even moved a few tables to ensure the arms could be supported while outstretched to preserve as much integrity as possible.

"I want all of you to keep your mouths shut about what we know. I want to see what Abigail can tell us looking at the body, and the crime scene photos we've got." Jack smiled, though his expression turned stale as he met Will's eyes. He knew Will was immediately on to him and it burned deep in Will's gut. Jack had gone to great lengths to ensure that Will did not know about his suspicions about Abigail. It was one more thing to pile on and Will certainly didn't need that in his current state of mind. The cat was, as it seemed, out of the bag now.

"All right, Abigail, it's your show." Jimmy said, sweeping a hand over the body.

Abigail glanced to all the faces in the room, eyes stuttering on Will. She tried to search his face for answers, tried to figure out what the expression on his face was because it kind of looked like pity. She looked away and down at the body. Her pupils dilated, she tried to keep her expression neutral. Her eyes fell on the circle of spine, the broken ribs. She remembered the strange, hollow sound of them breaking under her hands so much easier than she'd imagined it would be. She had thought the noise would be wet and full, but it was shallow and sharp and dry. She remembered the sweet, atrocious smell of organs gathered in his pelvic region. She remembered feeling abnormal as she could taste it on her tongue--that sweetness buried somewhere in the smell in the air--and about how it made her want to get closer. She remembered folding the spine and how hard it had been when she expected that to be the easy part. She remembered tears in her eyes, welling in frustration as she tried time and time again to bring the two ends together long enough to tie them. She had wanted to scream but knew she could not. She remembered her fingers itching, panic seeping in as she began constructing the symbols at the points. She wanted to reference the book but Hannibal instructed her not to do that, to do the whole thing from memory. The gaps and imperfections would be key in this exhibition.

"He uhm... he doesn't have any defensive wounds." Abigail started, rounding the table and staring down at the man. "So he didn't fight back. He could have been drugged or bound or--maybe he knew his killer." She let her eyes wander for a second before traveling back up to his face. "He's got rope burn in the corners of his mouth; so he /was/ gagged and bound." She tilted her head to the side. "It looks like there are antemortem, perimortem and postmortem injuries. The--the gutting was antemortem, the skin is bruised and inflamed. He was hung almost immediately after he died, all the blood is pooled in his feet." Abigail turned to look at Jimmy. "Can I borrow a glove?"

"Here, have two. And don't worry about giving them back." Jimmy said with a smile.

Abigail smiled in thanks and turned to the victim's feet. She pulled on the gloves and cautiously reached out to poke at the man's swollen, discolored left ankle. The discoloration did not white, did not change. She nodded a little and looked up at Jack.

"The blood is fixed. He was hanging for all the dissection and um... 'art.'" Abigail frowned and shook her head, carefully touching the circle of bone. "And this is wrong, isn't it? It's not like the others. I mean it is, but it isn't. It's the same circle but not in the way the other ones were the /same/ circle. Maybe this... wasn't meant to do the same thing? Like--this killer was removed from all of that. She either knows something they don't or feels like she does. She's mocking them by showing them how ridiculous they were."

Will felt his heart grow cold and stop. He looked down and parted his lips to breath, feeling like he wasn't getting enough oxygen. He could vaguely hear Jimmy, Beverly and Brian congratulating Abigail. Jimmy leaned forward and began pointing out the facts behind her physical statements. Brian gently pulled apart a few flaps of skin to show internal bruising. Beverly was thrilled with Abigail's grasp on mortem injuries. Will could feel Jack's eyes on him but he didn't want to look. He didn't want to see the fear and sorrow in Jack's eyes. He didn't want to think about how long Jack had this planned. He didn't want to think about what any of this meant. But it was useless. In Will's head a single word sounded like a horn, repeating over and over again like a tornado siren. Abigail's voice was clear and confident, like she didn't see the train coming in behind her.

'...this killer was removed from all that. She either knows something... She's mocking them...'

She.

# fifty two

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nudity
Alcohol abuse

"Jack?" Bella Crawford called as she stepped into the dark house. Her husband's car was home, but all the lights were off. It was normal for Jack to come home and spontaneously fall asleep--long, abnormal hours working often did that to a person--but he usually left lights on. She walked quietly into the kitchen and set her bags down, curiously glancing into all the rooms she could see from the island counter.

"Jack?" She frowned, removing her coat and setting it with her keys next to the groceries. She moved slowly through the rooms until she saw signs of Jack Crawford. His shoes, discarded with his socks on the floor. A few paces forward his jacket, belt and wallet. Even further his shirt, pants, boxers. Bella sighed and leaned against the door frame of the bathroom as she pushed open the door. As she feared Jack Crawford rested in the tub, almost asleep, bottle of Jack Daniels strangled in his grip.

"I'm going to take a stab in the dark that it was a rough day at work."

Jack slowly lifted his eyes to meet the sight of his wife in the doorway. He let out a hoarse chuckle and tapped a finger against the bottle.

"Good guess. You should come work for me."

"It's been years since you've done this, Jack. Years." Bella moved into the bathroom and sat on the side of the tub. "Can you tell me what's got you up in arms against your liver or are you going to make me guess?"

Jack frowned hard, his head still fuzzy but not quite fuzzy enough. He looked up and met Bella's eyes. He found strength there, power, and he always had. He played the boss at the FBI, he was the strong man; the man in charge; The Man. But he wasn't any of that underneath his professional charade. Bella was his strength. He could only go on because he could come back to her, drink down what power she offered him, and emerge like a full grown man once more. When the nightmares and demons threatened to over run him, Bella chased them off.

"Will." Jack whispered, voice broken. "Abigail." He shook his head and closed his eyes. "Everything is falling apart."

"How is it falling apart?" Bella reached over and took the bottle from Jack. He put up no resistance.

"Will is losing his mind, and I think I'm helping it run away. He's been lying to Alana and I, to everyone, about how he's holding up and it's gotten to the point where there's really only one option left." Jack took in a deep breath. "I'm going to lose him in one way or another and part of me almost wishes one of those ways was death because then at least I'd have something to mourn. They're going to lock him up like a nutcase. He'll never want to speak to me again. And if they ever let him out he's going to get as far away from me as possible. But he'll still be out there. I'm not burying anything resembling Will Graham he's just going to be gone, Bella. And I did that."

Bella glanced away. She could hear the trains of thought grinding in Jack's head like the pain of a migraine made audible. She reached back over and took his hand in both of hers. She began rubbing his knuckles, at a loss for words to help ease him.

"And... and Abigail." Jack laughed a dark laugh. "Bella she's--I didn't want to be right but I'm right. Damnit I'm right. I saw Will today, I saw him realize what I've been trying not to believe for almost a month. Seeing him realize just cemented it for me."

Bella winced, expecting the blow.

"She helped her father. She's been--all this time she's been hiding it from us, and for good reason. I don't know just how much she actually did, how much she actually participated, but she's not innocent. She was never innocent." Jack turned his hand an grabbed Bella's tightly. He tilted his head to look at her, eyes wandering in his drunken state.

"I have to arrest her. I have to put that girl on trial, and in questioning. That girl is the closest thing I've ever had to a daughter and now..."

"Jack these are things you cannot hold yourself responsible for." Bella whispered strongly. "They aren't your fault. If you were blind to Abigail's participation that doesn't mean you made her do those things. If you feel strongly enough that she needs to be apprehended, you're not at fault for that. If she's a danger to herself, to other people, you have to do your job. If Abigail was ever what we thought she was, she'll know you did what you had to do." Bella reached out and cupped Jack's face in her hand. He lifted his free palm from the water and grabbed the hand desperately.

"And Will?"

"Will..." Bella sighed. "Will has an empathy disorder. He knows it, you know it, I know it--everyone knows it. He knows you well enough to tell you when he's done, Jack. You push him in the field but if he's been keeping information from you, that's his own carnage. For all his empathy and imagination and strangeness, he's a damned good actor. He's fooled you before, and he's been fooling you again. You can beat yourself up for not seeing the signs but you have to remember he actively /hid/ them from you. It wasn't like he was honest and you ignored him. He was lying to you, keeping things from you and you carried on as normal, like he wanted you to."

Jack squeezed his eyes shut and nodded. He nodded again but it was a reflex more than anything. He turned his head and moved Bella's hand to his mouth where he kissed her palm. Then again.

"It doesn't make it hurt any less."

"And it's not going to stop the inevitable, Jack." She leaned forward and pressed her lips to Jack's forehead. "I'm so sorry. How quickly is this going to happen?"

"Like dominoes falling." Jack whispered brokenly. "I'm meeting with Dr.Chilton, Alana and Hannibal tomorrow morning to discuss Will. Then I'll be speaking to those I need to speak to in order to get a warrant out on Abigail. There is every likelihood that by this time tomorrow my best friend is going to be locked in a nut house and my surrogate daughter will be behind bars."

# fifty three

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Descriptions of mental illness
Conspiracy to ignore the agency of the mentally ill

"Dr.Chilton, thank you so much for making time for us, for this. I know you're a busy man." Jack offered sincerely, holding out his hand to shake Chilton's. He had moved things around in his office to comfortably accommodate all four individuals, but he kept himself behind his desk. Pretending as if being behind such a barrier would protect him from the pain of what was to come.

"I am." Chilton said with a smile, taking the center chair. "Very busy. It is a miracle anyone gets anything done with that kind of responsibility on their shoulders. I had the benefit of growing up in a house full of work-a-holics and over-organizers. I was primed and primped for this job, even if my parents did not realize it."

"And it shows." Alana said softly. "Your institution is a constant topic among any psychological circles."

"I know." Chilton smiled again. He turned his head to Hannibal, who had taken the seat to his left. "And I do not believe we have met. What piece are you in the puzzle of Will Graham?"

"I am an old friend of Will's." Hannibal said, holding out his hand respectfully. "My name is Hannibal Lecter. I knew Will many years before he met Jack and Alana. I have been staying with him the past few months, it was supposed to be a temporary arrangement, but that has fallen through."

"It seems as if Will Graham has fallen through for a lot of people, especially Will Graham." Chilton said with a nod, crossing his legs and leaning back in his chair. "Let us start off by discussing what we hope to accomplish here."

"We need a plan, a quick plan, to get Will the help he needs." Jack began, glancing to Hannibal and Alana. "He's been hiding things from Alana and I, so we're pretty certain he knows he needs treatment but is not looking to get treatment... for whatever reason."

"There are many reasons why people avoid getting the mental help they need, why they avoid seeing doctors at all." Chilton agreed, nodding. "Most of the time it's fear."

"Fear?" Jack echoed.

"Fear that something is really wrong, Jack." Alana clarified. "They're scared that not only will something be found, but that it will be much more serious than they are prepared to handle."

"So Will... could be scared of what is wrong with him?"

"Wouldn't you be?" Hannibal turned to face Jack. "He has always been ill at ease with his own mind and body. Things have only gotten worse. I am sure Will is frightened about what that could mean. Very rarely are worsening symptoms a sign of good things."

"And we are all fully aware that this course of action could lead Will to... well, resent the lot of you for years?" Chilton paused. "Best case scenario." He added, lifting his eyebrows.

"We are here to do what is best for Will." Hannibal said quickly, without waiting for Alana and Jack to give their input. "Though I am sure none of us wish actively to lose his friendship, his mental health and well being are our only concerns."

"Good, so we are all on the same page." Chilton folded his hands on top of his knee. "Unfortunately I am at a bit of a loss here. I know nothing of Will Graham aside from what I have gleaned from you and from my one brief session with him. In order to... /do what has to be done/ so to speak, I will need to be convinced Will is a danger to himself or others beyond any shadow of a doubt. With the head of the FBI, an achieved psychologist and a renown professor providing me with statements, I do not believe it will be a problem. However if I cannot be convinced, we will have to rely on Will to turn himself over to my care and I think we have just come to the conclusion that is not something which will happen."

"So we have to convince you that Will is losing his mind?" Jack grumbled.

"Essentially, yes."

"When I met Will, when we were both young men, I would not have classified him as neurotypical. It was easy to see that he either placed somewhere on the spectrum in fact or at least in part. His social behavior was stunted, awkward and forced, a combination of biology and his unusual upbringing. His mother was paralyzed from the shoulders down shortly before he was born, and from what Will told me that made her very resentful of the rest of the world and drove her to isolate herself from her own family while still harboring the need for their love and attention. It drove Will's father to seek refuge away from their home, and in turn he took young Will with him. This completely separate life of freedom and happiness and carelessness created a duality in Will that I would venture is not terribly unlike a minor personality disorder. With his father he was William but at home he was Will. This let him easily compartmentalize his feelings, thoughts and desires to be swapped out at a moment's notice. After the death of his mother Will expected things to remain as carefree as they had been when it was previously just himself and his father. When that reality did not show itself I feel as though Will suffered a loss akin to losing a sibling as well as his mother. Also with this all his stability vanished. He told me that he and his father did not have a home after they sold their condo to pay for his mother's funeral. They moved from hotel to hotel while his father worked in boatyards, often with Will trailing along behind him. A boy with Will's peculiar mentality needed, craved a level of organization this upbringing neglected to offer

him. His father did the best that he could, but it was irreversible damage." Hannibal paused and turned to look at Alana.

"Will told me he joined the force in large due to a police officer he met while he was in school. He said the officer took an interest in him and they became friends. After the officer was killed in the line of duty, Will applied to the academy. He became attached, after graduating to a fellow officer named Jacob Hobbs." Alana took a second to gather herself before continuing. "And Will was... devastated when it came to light that Agent Hobbs was responsible for the serial murder of numerous young women. It drove him to suicide attempts, drinking and self destruction. Over the past few years he did seem to be improving but with the increase in murders so closely resembling those of Jacob Hobbs... I feel Will is in a free fall. Based on what Professor Lecter has told us, Will has never had stability in any form when it came to other people. He's been an island his whole life. That's a lot of stress to pile up and never escape. He's had no outlet, no break from himself and his own personal Hell. I believe, firmly, that this has all boiled down to a break in his psyche."

"He is losing time. Frequently. There are multiple episodes a week. His memory of the episode itself can be vague, sometimes reliable, but he rarely remembers anything before the episode and these gaps range from moments to full hours before. He finds himself waking up with no recollection of how he got where he is. He has been acting aggressively towards myself and towards his dogs--not physically--but verbally. He is very short tempered and that is very unlike him."

"He's... unfocused at work." Jack spoke up, voice gravel in open wounds. "Or he's too focused. It's like I'm working with two different Wills. One is confident and sure of himself and unlike any bit of Will I've ever known. The other is... quiet and demure and desperate, for what I don't know. He's the vulnerable side of Will that I saw after Hobbs' death. I get one or the other, nothing in between."

"Well, I can certainly affirm concern for his own well being. This is the kind of person who would stop taking medication--"

"He has."

"--point proven. He has already shown the capacity for self harm, even suicide, and it is not out of the question that he attempt such a thing again. Agent Crawford, have you seen anything to suggest Will might be a danger to those around him? Knowingly or... unknowingly?"

Jack paused. He pursed his lips together tightly as slowly all eyes were on him. He felt his chest tightened like a straight jacket, pulled far too tight. He was suffocating. He glanced down at his desk.

"The confident Will I've been seeing more and more of, he reminds me strongly of someone I used to know and that association does lead me to believe Will Graham is capable of hurting other people, knowingly or unknowingly as an act of desperation or aggression."

"And who does Confident Will remind you of, Agent Crawford?" Chilton pressed.

"Agent Jacob Hobbs."

# fifty four

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Lots of sad people
No really
They are all so sad

"Thank you again, Dr.Chilton, for everything." Alana said as she shook the man's hand. It felt like sealing a deal with the devil.

"It is appreciated but not necessary, this is after all what I do for a living. Keep things calm and quiet around Will, like we discussed. I will get everything in order and then Jack will bring him to me. We will get him admitted and start working on his rehabilitation." The psychiatrist nodded, clasping Alana's hand in both of his. He gave her a squeeze, affirming he knew just how hard this would be for her, for everyone involved.

Alana crossed her arms over her chest as she watched Chilton descend the stairs of the FBI building and step into the parking lot. She rubbed her bare biceps and returned to the relative safety of Jack's office. Hannibal stood passively at the window, Jack was forever a statue behind his desk. Alana could read the heartbreak on him, but she knew that was only because she had known and worked with him for so long. He was a very good actor, and no one else would be able to read such emotion on him. As she moved to take a seat Jack tapped his desk as if attempting to find strength in the sound.

"Before I let you two go there is... one more thing I need to address." Jack paused as both Hannibal and Alana turned attention to him. He spoke slowly as Hannibal moved to sit, wanting to make sure they were both in front of him and at attention before dropping the bomb. "I understand Dr.Chilton's worry about over-stressing Will between now and when he's admitted. I fully intend to do everything in my power to help keep him as stress free as possible, but that may be a moot point. Something has... come to my attention and I cannot wait to act on it. In fact, I may be acting on it as early as this evening. It's rather out of my hands at this point, and I hope you'll both understand. Even though this will put Will under a great deal more stress, and might actually be the catalyst we are all here trying to prevent."

"What have you done, Jack?" Alana hissed quickly, narrowing her eyes. She knew the look on Jack's face. It was the look of a man who had already wrestled with his decision, had come to a conclusion, and nothing would talk him out of it. She rarely saw that face and enjoyed what came next.

"We have enough suspicion to place Abigail Hobbs under arrest for assisting in the murders of her father." Jack spoke slowly, meeting Alana's eyes. "Following the conclusion of our meeting here I am putting pieces into place to secure a warrant for her arrest. If everything goes smoothly she will be in custody within the next forty eight hours."

"That is..." Hannibal sighed, "definitely going to injure Will's already fragile state of mind."

"I know, but it can't wait."

"You think... You believe that Abigail..." Alana shook her head, voice deadpan. "I knew you had suspicions but Jack, you're that sure? It's--It's /Abigail/."

"I'm sure, Alana. Sure enough that I'm taking steps to bring her in, even knowing what this could do to Will." Jack let his words settle, heavy and cumbersome.

"How much notice--Can you keep Hannibal and I up to date on the situation, Jack?" Alana pressed. "I think one of us should be with Will when this information comes out. It won't stop the crash but we can maybe ease the descent. I don't want him alone when he hears this."

"Will--might already know. He might already suspect, at least in part, that either I'm working to arrest Abigail or that she's guilty."

"And how would he know that, Jack?" Alana spat, anger easy to use in place of the numbing sorrow coursing through her blood. She was calmed only slightly as Hannibal reached over and put a hand on her knee.

"He was present when I brought Abigail in the other day to consult on a case. He saw what I saw; heard what I heard. She knew things in the same way that he does, but we all know Will is the only one who does what he does. No amount of wishing can make that go away. I saw the look on his face."

"Damnit Jack." Alana whispered. "Damn it." She hesitated for a second longer before standing. She barely spared Hannibal a glance as she exited the room.

Hannibal frowned. He turned back to Jack as the glass door of his office creaked shut.

"She's just angry." He offered, noting the look on Jack's face. He could feel the sorrow, see it radiating off the other man. It would help cloud his judgement. "Anger is an easy emotion to latch on to in times of stress and vulnerability. She doesn't blame you."

"Yes, she does. And she's right too. This is mostly my fault."

"I fail to see how that's true. You could not have predicted Abigail's guilt, you had no way of knowing. You had to wait until she slipped up or until you were clear headed enough to see it. The girl has been surrounded by officers and investigators since her father's murders and before. You weren't the only one blinded to her. And as far as Will is concerned, I think we can all share blame on that one, Jack. He hid things from you and I failed to mention them until it was too late. You can regret Will not wanting to seek help, but you cannot blame

yourself that he didn't find it." Hannibal stood and placed a hand on Jack's desk. "I am sorry, Jack."

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Hannibal paused as he moved towards the motorcycle he was still using. Alana's car was still in the parking lot, which surprised him. He had assumed she would have driven as far away from the source of her pain as possible. He hesitated and then turned, moving his body towards her car. He could plainly see her in the driver's seat, head bowed and shoulders quivering. He approached slowly, purposefully, and tried to give her as much time as possible to notice his presence. Eventually he lifted his hand and knocked as gently as possible against the window. He offered a soft smile as she was startled, turning to face him with as many tears on her face as in her eyes. He stepped back as she opted to open the door rather than roll down her window. She remained seated.

"I am sorry, I didn't mean to intrude." Hannibal started, keeping his voice low and sweet. He knitted his eyebrows together. "When I saw your car was still here..."

"It's--it's ok." Alana offered a smile of sorrow.

The smile slowly broke and she reached up to cover her face with her hands. Hannibal moved forward and pulled her to his chest. He tilted his cheek to rest atop her head as he rubbed her back soothingly. He let her sob loudly against him for a second before speaking.

"I know this hurts, Alana, but you have to try and remember that it is for Will's best interest. And as for Abigail," Hannibal sighed against Alana's hair, "you must mourn her in your own way but you must not hold guilt for her. You and Jack are very alike in that way and you are both the kinds of people susceptible to drowning in that guilt."

"You should have been a psychiatrist." Alana said with a painful laugh, sitting back and wiping at her eyes. "I--I'm sorry for putting you out like this. I barely know you and I'm crumbling in front of you like it's your responsibility to do something about it."

"Don't do that, Alana. We may have known each other a few short months but friendships often bloom in shorter spans of time. I consider you a good friend and I hope that is a mutual feeling. The only responsibility I assume is that of caring for a friend. I am willing to be a safe place for you to crumble, Alana, if you need it." Hannibal tilted his head to watch Alana look up at him slowly. "Though if it makes you feel better, you can ask nicely. I'll consider it a favor." He smiled softly, taking a risk on offering a joke. His body relaxed as Alana laughed.

"Then at least now, for the sake of my own pride because I can't take much more hurt, can I... Would you help me hold together enough to crumble, just a little?" Alana's soft, joking voice was soon swallowed by the sorrow eating it's way out of her gut and leaving destruction in it's wake. It turned to sobs as Hannibal nodded and moved forward again quickly, letting her rest once more against his chest and give voice to her pain.

He tried desperately to hide a smile in her hair. He had found his temporary anchor and within moments had sealed the contract.

# fifty five

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nothing of note

Hannibal tapped the handle bar of his motorcycle as he watched the young humans before him, chatting excitedly amongst one another. His helmet hung from the right side, warm from recent use, humming with the dying echoes of the bike's engine. The demon watched faces carefully, though knowing he would immediately be aware of Abigail's presence in the throng of bodies. Like a torch in the night. Hannibal sat up a bit straighter as he saw her beacon, mixed within those who were lesser and blind.

He waited until he could see her face before lifting a hand in greeting. He watched recognition dawn on her face, followed by confusion and then--and it thrilled him in some way--fear. She happily dismissed herself from the two girls she was walking with and moved towards Hannibal. The demon lifted a helmet from where it sat behind him. He held it out for her.

"We need to talk. Privately." He said, cheerfully as he could.

Abigail stared at the offered helmet a moment longer before reaching out to take it. She carefully secured it in place as Hannibal did the same. She stuttered in climbing onto the bike, having never ridden one before. As Hannibal started the machine and the roar rumbled through her, she latched her arms tightly around Hannibal's middle. She felt him chuckle. She pressed closer and closed her eyes as he settled comfortably, gained his balance, and pulled out of the parking lot. It didn't take her long to relax, slowly at first and then seemingly all at once. She opened her eyes and watched the landscape zip by in smooth horizons. Hannibal in front of her provided a steady balance as she sat up and moved away from his back. She left her hands firmly grasping his sides, but was able to sit up and enjoy watching the world fly by.

She felt reality and fear sink back into her gut as Hannibal pulled off onto a scenic over pass. There were no other cars, no other bikes, no other people. It was just far enough off the highway to be hidden, but not suspicious. Abigail felt her chest clench and her mouth go dry. Hannibal carefully parked the bike.

"Mind your step getting down; she heats up." Hannibal offered, removing his helmet.

He stepped off the bike without turning to offer Abigail assistance. Fear wafted from her not unlike Jack's sorrow had earlier that morning. It distorted everything around her. Hannibal

moved to lean against a small wooden railing, intended to let guests view the rather scenic drop below. He sighed heavily as he heard Abigail step up beside him.

"I'm afraid we have a problem, Abigail."

"What... kind of problem?"

"I thought we were careful. I thought I had prepared you for every available scenario. I thought we had this in the bag, so to speak. I was wrong." Hannibal tilted his head towards Abigail slightly. "Jack suspected your participation in your father's murders far before I thought he did. I am afraid your little bargaining act has just cost you your freedom, possibly your life."

"But..." Abigail shook her head and stepped back.

Hannibal turned to watch her. He could see gears in her head turning, catching up with her and slowing down. She was terrified and it was painted all over her. He cocked his head to one side as she looked up at him.

"What am I going to do?"

"The only thing you can do, Abigail." Hannibal reached out and cupped her cheek in his palm. "You're going to die."

# fifty six

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Hannibal's bullshit, which is apparently very tiring

"You're quiet tonight, Will. Are you all right?" Hannibal frowned at Will over his dinner plate. "I know you enjoy fish, so it can't be that."

"I'm just--thinking." Will snapped, lowering his hand to pet Winston who sat patiently under the table.

"You're thinking rather loudly."

"I haven't said anything."

"I know." Hannibal smiled. The grin widened as Will met his eyes.

"You know, Hannibal, I'm starting to find your bullshit tiring."

"That's a shame. I have tried my best to keep you interested. I suppose if you're bored you can simply extract yourself. There is no one forcing you to endure. You know what you have to do in order to be free of my nuisance, Will." Hannibal placed his fork down and folded his hands in his lap. He stared across the table as Will did the same.

"I'm worried what you'll do if I let you go."

"I will return to my home plane, of course." Hannibal shrugged. "I'm not quite sure what you're worried about."

"I'm worried someone else will summon you. I'm worried you'll do this to someone else. I'm worried... what kind of Hell you'll raise."

"Someone else /will/ eventually summon me. That's how this works. The only thing you're doing by keeping me here is prolonging that inevitable someone. Once you die, I'll be freed and then it's a matter of time."

"I feel like you have a goal in mind. I feel like you're striving towards something; all of this is connected somehow and you're hiding it from me. If I can keep you here for another thirty, forty years, it might be enough to put a stop to whatever it is you're trying to make happen." Will sneered slightly as Hannibal chuckled at him, and returned to eating his salmon as if they weren't discussing what they were discussing. Painfully casual.

"I'm flattered you think so highly of me, Will, but I've told you I'm not moving those pieces. My game is here, with you."

"I told you to stop what you were doing with Abigail." Will whispered after a long moment, chin quivering just slightly. "I know you put her up to this. You're responsible for everything that's happened to her. She was fine until you showed up, until I--until I brought you here."

"That is entirely untrue and you know it." Hannibal seemed suddenly offended and put out. "Abigail is being accused of helping her father murder girls who were murdered years before you summoned me. I have nothing sinister planned for Abigail."

Hannibal paused as Will leaned back. The demon watched as the man rubbed at his chin, his forehead, the back of his neck, eyes drifting uneasily.

"Every night we have these little chats," Hannibal paused to sip his wine. "You accuse me of some great wrong doing, then get sucked into your guilt, then attempt to blame even that on me, before eventually falling into a silent war of sorts with what you perceive as reality which leads you into a restless and broken slumber. It's unhealthy. I thought we were past this but you continue to rebel and at this point you're at risk to lose more than you know. You're a carriage horse bucking at the restraints--you may not move forward, you may not bring your driver to their destination--but when that carriage tips over you're going with it."

"Better to just count my losses, give in and accept the bit?"

"Most carriage drivers treat their horses like royalty. It can be good to be in someone else's yoke."

"I thought I was in charge here."

"Every relationship needs a balance, or it's not a relationship--it's slavery." Hannibal stood and gathered his dishes.

Will tilted his head just slightly as Hannibal moved to walk by him. The demon paused and Will could smell smoke and lemongrass. When the pause continued Will glanced up to find Hannibal's almost concerned maroon eyes waiting for him.

"You should take some time off, Will. Relax. You have continued to push yourself and with this recent revelation about Abigail I feel you'll start to do irreparable damage to yourself if you continue like this. Take a vacation. Take a long weekend out on the water; use the boat you spend so long fixing up every weekend." Hannibal smiled. "Trust me, it will help."

Will rolled his jaw from side to side as Hannibal vanished into the kitchen. The man was an itch inside his brain that he couldn't reach to scratch. There were times when he forgot everything he knew about Hannibal. Moments, hours at a time would move by and it was easy to relax as if they were old friends, as if this was another man whom Will could connect to. Then reality crashed down. There were hours, days where he found himself numb to everything but the screaming in his head that demons were real and he had summoned one. Back and forth it went, never picking up or losing momentum. Will's head was in the middle of a Newton's Cradle: Hannibal on one end, Jack on the other.

# 57

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

A lot of effort on Will's part, honestly

Will sighed as he leaned back, wiping the back of his hand over his forehead. He could feel oil mingling with sweat and smearing over his skin. It felt good. It was work in a way what he did for the FBI never was. It was physical and almost instantly rewarding, versus mental and victorious on a short half-life. He rested momentarily against the side of the boat, closing his eyes and trying to relax. It worked for about a second. For that brief, brilliant second he was on open water, calm and quiet; just Will, the water, the wind and the world... and Hannibal.

Will opened his eyes slowly as he heard the front door of his house swing open. Buster and Winston--asleep on either side of the porch--eagerly got up and padded towards it. Will glanced over from where he'd pulled the boat out into the driveway for better lighting to work.

"You're filthy." Hannibal sighed, approaching the boat in as casual an outfit as he dared.

"Yeah well, working with your hands will do that to you." Will snipped, though the venom wasn't in it.

"My bid on a small house in Baltimore was accepted, Will." Hannibal jumped immediately to the point, pushing his hands into his pockets and staring at the back of Will's head as the other man went back to work. "I'm heading down in a few hours to sign the paperwork. With any luck I'll be out of your hair by next weekend."

"Are you sure you can do that? I mean... our /relationship/ permits you to do that?"

"Our relationship is... unique, Will. I am not sure I could put a name to it. Are you suggesting a night of misguided actions a few months ago necessitates my staying?"

Will blanched slightly, and stared at the machine before him. He slowly turned to look at Hannibal and found the other man staring off into the woods behind the house. There were times when it seemed Hannibal was just as confused as Will about what reality was and was not. There were times when Will and Hannibal could converse about demons and summoning with no metaphors, direct conversation. But there were times when Hannibal seemed to have forgotten that he was not just another man. He would leave out words or avoid specific topics

or assume Will meant something else and it sounded like the kind of conversations that two men had.

Will had almost forgotten that... night of misguided actions. He felt his cheeks redden, his pulse quicken as the memories returned to him all at once. His eyes regained focus as he realized Hannibal had turned to look at him.

"Do you want me to stay?" Hannibal almost shrugged, though that was far too banal an action for him.

"I want you to... " Will started, then paused as Hannibal's eyebrows lifted. "I can't tell you not to go if you've already won the bid now, can I?" Will clarified carefully.

"I suppose you could, if you wanted. Though your hesitation suggests you are not altogether opposed to the idea of me leaving you to your own devices. This was only supposed to be temporary. I don't want to wear out my welcome."

Will shrugged, making it a large and obscene gesture from atop the boat.

"Fine. Put yourself away like fine China. I'll set you on the table when I need you."

Hannibal's mouth curled into a smirk at one side. He watched Will in silence for a few more moments.

"Will you be all right here, alone?"

"I've made it thus far, haven't I?" Will didn't like how this conversation settled in his stomach like a kind of break-up. "I don't need a babysitter."

"No, I suppose not... but a confidante, a friend, you could certainly use right now."

"I have those. And weren't you just saying last night that I needed to take a trip out alone on my boat to clear my head? Help me relax?"

"I never stated you should take that trip alone, Will."

"You never suggested company either." Will pulled a smirk to his face which echoed the one Hannibal had worn only moments ago. "Would you like to go on a weekend get-away with me, Hannibal? Just you, me and the open waters? No witnesses."

Hannibal quirked a brow and chuckled.

"If I didn't know better, I would assume that was a threat."

"Assume whatever you want. Do whatever you want. You obviously don't need my permission; like you said last night, our relationship has to have balance or it's slavery."

"I don't want this to end badly, Will. You are my friend. I'm not leaving because I don't want to be in your company, I'm leaving to give you space--to find my own space."

"In Baltimore."

"Yes, in Baltimore." Hannibal rubbed his fingers along the vial in his pocket. "After the tediousness of signing paperwork and deciphering legal jargon, I may just take you up on the offer of a weekend on the water."

Will paused once more in his work. He glanced over his shoulder as Hannibal turned and headed back towards the house. He watched his dogs once more leap to their feet to lick and nudge at Hannibal's hands. The man offered them both a few good pats before returning to whatever he had been doing inside. Will imagined gutting him and chumming the waters behind his boat. He returned to the engine with doubled effort.

# fifty eight

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains:

Nothing dangerous (I don't think)
Mention of leeches

"So, what you're telling me is... we haven't been able to find Abigail for three days, and now Will has gone missing?" Jack Crawford said slowly, hands clasped in front of his lips. He stared hard across his desk at his 'team'; Brian, Jimmy, Beverly and Alana.

"I think that's the jist of it." Jimmy growled, clearly displeased that Jack's frustration seemed to be turned on them. "Nobody has seen Abigail since she left school the day you put out her warrant. Her friends all say she said she was going to take a walk before heading back to her dorm and she never came back. We've got a Missing Person and a Most Wanted out on her."

"Hannibal was the last person to see Will." Alana said quietly. "He said they had a bit of a fight the day he went to sign papers for his house in Baltimore."

"He did mention that Will was working pretty feverishly on that old boat he keeps locked up in his shed." Brian offered with a shrug. "We could check local waterways, rivers, docks at the beach. We've got more of a lead on him then we do Abigail."

"Could they be together?" Beverly sighed, voicing what no one really wanted to. "Will was unstable, to say the least, getting worse. Abigail could have gone to him, convinced him to run with her. We all know everyone has a weakness for Abigail."

Jack rubbed his face and leaned back heavily in his chair. He shook his head.

"Get everybody out there. Get us in the water. Get us checking every damned inch of the ocean, of the James. Anywhere he could conceivably have gone in a day." He paused. "And if Abigail is with him... I want them both in custody."

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Hannibal's face was passive as he stared out the window in his brand new dining room. In all his years on the mortal plane he'd never had the opportunity to own anything. It didn't really matter, but it did feel... good. It felt like a soft tingle down his back. It filled the strange longing he and his kin shared to be accepted and one with the very mortals they preyed upon and manipulated. It was almost a romantic desire, to belong so entirely. Demons were demons, they were just as vast as humans with a plane just as complex and sentient just intricately alone. No matter how many demons congregated in one place it was always

exclusive and unsocial. Like living among high society wasps. You could never trust anyone, no bonds were ever formed and those that were ended up short lived and tragic.

There was such a cupidity for humanity's chaotic poetry.

"How does it feel to own something?" A soft voice, no more than a whisper greeted Hannibal's ear from behind him.

The dining room was, as of yet, still mostly unfurnished. The feminine voice was still somehow a tiny sound in the large room. It did not echo like other sounds, which would make one suspect it was demure but it was quite the opposite. It was knowing, almost condescending but careful. After all there was nothing to protect Bedelia from Hannibal now.

"Soothing and yet, numbing." Hannibal turned slightly, watching the woman's feet slowly approach him. "It never mattered to me before, however now it feels almost necessary."

"You've finally found yourself a summoner with a balance of dumb luck and insight to give you only what you need to exist here."

"It's not enough."

"It's never enough for you, /Hannibal/." Bedelia's lips and tongue formed around the name awkwardly. Hannibal could hear the hiss of his old title under the new one. "You're like a leech in that way. A greedy, glutenous little thing that gorges itself until it falls prone to the ground, only to wake days later famished."

"Blood sustains a leech. Is it not natural to crave the thing that nourishes you?"

"What nourishes you, Hannibal?" Bedelia reached out and traced the frame of the glass door with a finger. "Things? Legal documents attached to aliases you didn't chose? A fleeting glimpse of what it might mean to be free?"

"I don't recall you being so cryptic, Bedelia."

"I have you to thank for that. I have you to thank for many things." Bedelia tilted her head as Hannibal smiled at her.

"Do you thank me for everything, then?"

"No. No there are things I curse you for. Things that fester in my chest in the middle of the night until the pain is too much to quietly swallow. There are things that crawl out of my throat like the pressure of swallowing my own tongue; destroyed by a part of myself I could not live without."

"You asked for this."

"No. You gave this to me."

"Consider it a gift." Hannibal turned back to the window.

"What gift has Will given you, Hannibal? A new name and freedom. The vial in your pocket is all you will ever need, provided Will stay alive and safe. How ironic our fates, don't you think? You long to remain here and yet in thirty years you will likely be pulled back to Hell..."

"And you want nothing more than to die, but in thirty years you will be unchanged."

"When Will figures you out he will break the circle."

"Perhaps. I don't intend to abandon him, however. He will figure me out in time, and when he does I will show him everything I showed you. The catch is, I /like/ Will. I never cared for you, Bedelia."

# fifty nine

Chapter Summary

This chapter contains:

Blood
Gore
Amputation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*"Have you ever heard of a memetic hazard, Will?"*

*Will knitted his brows together and glanced over his shoulder at Jacob Hobbs. The Agent stood in his dining room, staring a framed picture of an old boat. His hands were in his pockets but Will could see a nervous energy about him, like he wanted to wring his hands and rock back and forth in a corner. Will didn't like seeing him so disturbed but it felt like it was becoming more normal for Jacob. Will was used to being the stray, vulnerable one. It was an odd thing to be on the outside looking in.*

*"I uh, don't think so."*

*"It's a psychological phenomenon, almost like a highly contagious disease. It's information or an idea that's passed from one person to the next, harmful information. It's distressing and unnerving and it... it latches onto your mind and doesn't go away. You can almost forget about it but you know it's always there in the background of your thoughts, waiting to consume you at any given second."*

*"It sounds... lovely. Like, mass hysteria?"*

*"Yeah, a bit like that." Jacob moved to join Will in the kitchen, where the brunette man was washing their dinner dishes. "It's also a bit like realizing a truth you were blind to before. That moment when, as a kid, you understand the finality of death. It changes your perception not only of the thing, but of the world at large. Suddenly everything becomes a gateway to death; everything relates to death. You can never go back to the way you were before. It's isolating and it's bonding."*

*Will flung his hands at the air to dry them. He turned to face Jacob with a frown.*

*"Have you experienced a memetic hazard?" He asked timidly.*

*"Yes." Jacob Hobbs slowly looked up. "My reality is shifting, Will. I'm not sure what's true anymore. I feel like I've been lied to, by everyone I've ever known but... they didn't know they were lying."*

*"What is it? What's the thing?" Will felt a shiver run up his spine as Jacob met his eyes.*

*"I don't want to tell you. I don't want... I don't want to infect you."*

Will's eyes drifted open to the sound of seagulls. He'd heard people call them raucous, unattractive birds, but he loved the sound. It wasn't quite tires on gravel but it came close. As expected the gentle lapping of water followed shortly after the gulls, and Will felt his body rocked gently. He breathed in deep and pulled cool salty air into his lungs. He prepared himself and then--as was becoming far too normal--he attempted to sort through his memories of the last forty eight hours to decide which ones were real and which ones had been hallucinations.

He'd taken Hannibal's advice and set his boat to sea. He'd neglected to invite Hannibal, however, opting instead for solitude. He hadn't even taken his dogs, instead relying on a neighbor boy to feed them. (Will knew the kid a little, trusted him enough to care for his dogs. The kid was brutally honest and Will liked that.) Two days of bliss and nothing but the ocean. His skin felt raw and chapped but it was magnificent.

He slowly poured himself out of his bed, stretching and bending in all sorts of ways to wake up muscles that weren't getting regular use on the boat. He frowned down at himself after a moment. His hands looked dirty, felt almost sticky. He rubbed his fingers together. Not so much dirty as stained, all the way up to his elbows. He reached inward and touched his bare chest; he never slept without a shirt. He tended to get into horrible fits of night sweats and having a shirt in the beginning meant he could save some of his blankets from getting soaked the first time he woke up drenched.

He pulled on a spare tank top and headed up to the deck, confusion still on his features but he refused to let it sink in. He was alone, on his boat, on the open water. This was a time to relax. He felt a darker sense of unease in his bones as he realized he was docked. He couldn't remember dropping anchor or returning to anything like civilization. The voicemail he'd left Jack indicated he'd be gone at least another two days.

Will stepped out into the sunlight, turned towards the front of the boat... and heard his heart thudding in his ears, louder than the gulls and the gentle lapping of water.

Blood nearly covered the deck of his ship, poured like gasoline and clotting in the far corners where the ship didn't rock as much. Underneath the pool of crimson Will could see a circle carved into the boat--his damned boat. It was not the summoning circle he'd come to know, there were no symbols on the points, it was simply a circle. And in the center, presented like a gift basket, was a finger. Will took a hesitant, shaking step forward.

"Stop right there!"

"Hands in the air! Put your hands in the air!"

Will did as he was told, blinking furiously. He could hear boots on the dock, too many, approaching him quickly and with great confidence. His mind was rocketed back to a warehouse; boots on the ground like thunder; a voice pleading in the air like a melody. His breathing became quick, shallow and his head swam. The boots on the dock stopped, and Will could hear a single person walking down the dock. One foot heavier than the other to compensate for an old injury. Will slowly turned his head to see Jack, face pale. The two agents met eyes and Will saw tears echoing his own in Jack's eyes.

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Will stared down at the table in front of him. He tried desperately not to look at the two way mirror to his right. He was on the wrong side of it. He wrung his hands together on the table, thumbs pressing against one another, knuckles white. The door creaked open and Will looked up.

Jack walked in, face set like the grim reaper about to take a man who did not deserve it but knew it had to be done. The other agent slowly took the seat across from Will. Waves crashed in the room around them; the stag bellowed in the distance, shrieking it's antlers down the other side of the two way mirror.

"We ID'd the blood on your boat, Will." Jack said evenly. "It, and the finger, belonged to Abigail Hobbs." Jack took a slow, steadying breath. He looked up to meet Will's eyes.

"Will Graham, you are under arrest for murder."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter concludes Part One.

Thank you everyone for reading, the kudos and the comments!

The story is--obviously--not over! I will be continuing it with part two: The Devil Is In The Details

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!